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COVENT GARDEN  
FICTION

# KITTY

M. BETHUNE-COQUETTE

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS  
ON  
“KITTY.”

“The fascination which holds all the male characters in this novel spell-bound at the feet of the heroine, is to some extent communicated to its readers....the story is lively and clever....these scenes of artist-life are amusing; there is a certain dash in every description; the dialogue is bright and sparkling.”—*Athenaeum*.

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“The other characters that group round Kitty are capitally drawn; beautiful Perugino Neave, the simple-hearted genius, without guile and without principle; jolly Mrs. Cornford, with her clever saws, her pathetic tenderness, and her shrewd sense; Dr. Norman, the scholar—earnest, high-souled, and reserved—a man whose feelings run in narrow channels, deep, clear, and strong; Ella Bartelott, a white rose among women, and her fussy father, Sir George.”—*Echo*.





"' It is so hard to say either Yes or No when we say it for life.' "—*Page 04.*

BOSTON

HENRY & KELLY & CO., INC.

1872

Sept 22d



# K I T T Y.

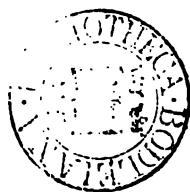
BY

M. B E T H A M - E D W A R D S,

AUTHOR OF

"DOCTOR JACOB," "THE SYLVESTRHS,"

ETC. ETC.



LONDON:  
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# K I T T Y.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *SHOW DAY IN BOHEMIA.*

IT was the day before sending in pictures to the Royal Academy. Carriage after carriage set down ladies dressed in velvet and silk at the doors of rich and happy artists, who listened to their pretty critics deferentially, though feeling a little bored, and meditating, all the while, a seven days' trip abroad.

Outside this charmed circle—that is to say, outside the equatorial line dividing South Kensington from Bohemia, success from struggle, hair powder and truffles from maids-of-all-work and muddle—there was no less excitement going on : real R.A.s looking in for two whole minutes, and criticising in a friendly, lofty way ; buyers and dealers paying less hasty visits ; and an interchange of courtesies and encouragements among all the artists living in Bohemia. There were three persons in a dingy little studio in No. 3 Paradise Place, Fulham, whose excitement had reached its culminating point, and was now subsiding over a quiet enjoyment of cigars and a bottle of French wine. Nobody says that the ladies were smoking, though that liberty is allowed to all who inhabit the Bohemian Elysium. The elder lady was florid, untidy, and ungrammatical of speech, clothing her thoughts much as she did her body, without any regard whatever to niceties ; she didn't see what parts of speech, pins, and laces were good for, she would say ; and as little did she care whether decent society liked her to wear her shoes down at heel, and to say

"you was," or no,—what was decent society to her? As she sat opposite to her picture, a clever masculine subject, of which she could well afford to be proud, she looked the very impersonation of happy artistic vagabondage. You could see, nevertheless, that she loved her picture as a mother loves her child; that, despite the superficial vulgarity of her manners, she had a soul, and craved colour and light, and beautiful shapes, as other people crave meat and drink and wherewithal to be clothed.

The younger lady was a slender, handsome, sulky-looking girl of about twenty-three, not too tidy either, but if slatternliness is pardonable at all, it must be when the culprit has large eyes, a beautiful mouth, and a skin like pearl. She sat opposite to the picture—which was her own portrait—though her eyes were turned away from it, and looked into the deepest depths of her wine-glass.

The third of the party was a young man, who sat on the table, his long legs hanging down, his arms crossed in an attitude of delicious idleness, his hair blown ecstatically about his brow. He was blonde, blue-eyed, and beautiful, terribly pale, and wanting in bone and muscle, but energetic to the finger-tips, as you could see. Just now his pale cheeks were flushed with pleasure, for his three pictures—in a second studio higher up—had been praised by a member of the hanging committee; and praise in such quarters is like good paper-money, sure to be endorsed further on.

"Who first thought of the champagne?" asked the mistress of the house, gaily; "if it's you, Perry, you are a capital fellow."

"Kitty says nothing," said Perry, looking at the girl's downcast face with an expression of intense vexation. "Kitty, why are you so glum, when Polly and I are just beginning to grow rich and immortal?"

"Oh! never mind about being immortal, but do get rich," said Kitty; "I should like you so much better if you were never dunned for money, and wore unexceptionable waist-coats. One doesn't enjoy champagne half so much when

drunk in this disreputable way. It should come, as a matter of course, and without any worry."

"My good Kitty, who is worrying, I should like to know ? Why, we are as gay as larks !" said Mrs Cornford.

Kitty finished her wine very slowly, pursed up her handsome lips much as if she had been taking physic, and then pushed away her glass with a gesture of impatience, and made answer—

"It's nice to drink wine, and it's kind of Perry to give it us ; but you know he has to pay for it, and he's not a Rothschild."

"You shouldn't say such things to the man you're engaged to ; it's—well—it's not pretty. Now, if I were young, and Perry were making love to me, I shouldn't think it becoming to say a word if he gave me a velvet gown. I should just wear it, and look my best, to please him ; and if a time came when money was wanted and not forthcoming, I should say, 'Why my dear, there's the velvet gown,'—and off it would go to the place round the corner !"

"Bravo, Polly !" cried Perry, clapping his hands ; then, catching a look of reproach from Kitty, he forbore, and added, "But you're right, Kitty, and if Polly and I were left to ourselves we should never get the handling of a ten-pound note."

Just then there was a double knock. Perry opened the door an inch, and caught hold of the little maid-of-all-work by the skirt : "If it is any one for me," he whispered, "show 'em the pictures, and say I'm engaged."

"Oh, of course, it's little Laura !" Mrs Cornford said, and hastily put the wine-bottle and glasses out of sight. "Now, Perry, you run away, please. Kitty, do you think you could give the child a lesson for me ? I must go into the city, to see about my frames."

Before Kitty could reply or Perry obey, Mrs Cornford's pupil came in : a round-eyed, pink-cheeked school-girl, about sixteen, with a large portfolio under her arm, who stood in the doorway silent and blushing.

"Come in, my dear," said Mrs Cornford ; "it's only Mr

Neeve, the gentleman who has my drawing-room floor, you know. Miss Rogers has made you provokingly punctual to-day, as usual; schoolmistresses are so provoking; but if I give you a start, you will do very well with Miss Silver here to look over you, and I will make up for lost time next lesson. Show me what you've done. Whew! what a little brick you are to work! Now, by way of rewarding you with lollipops, you shall try that Indian jar with the red curtain behind it. Here are the colours she is to use, Kitty, and don't be overnice about quantity. The jar must be warm, you know; whatever you do, you must keep it warm." She rubbed a dozen patches of colour on the palette, made a pencil mark or two, dashed in a little red here, a little purple there, and then hurried away. In less than two minutes she returned munching a biscuit, and tying on her bonnet at the same time.

"Mind what I said to you just now, Kitty, and don't be up to your old tricks, Laura, dabbing on cold greys and whites" (Kitty had hardly ever handled a paint-brush in her life). "Ta-ta, my dears; be good children, or, when I come home, you'll be whipped, I'll warrant you."

For some minutes after she had gone there was a perfect silence. Kitty seemed to know so much about painting that her young pupil thought her infinitely more clever than Mrs Cornford—ten times nicer, too! When she pleased Mrs Cornford, that lady would lay a heavy but approving hand on her shoulder, crying, "Why, what a jolly little soul you are!" and when she displeased her, it would be, "Lawks! goodness gracious me! brat, you have no more idea of painting than a toad with one ear!"

But Kitty called her *Darling*, and *Dear*, in a protective, superior sort of way, especially fascinating to little girls of a sentimental turn, like Laura; and Kitty praised her fair hair, and let her see without expressed praise that she admired her eyes, till the child felt alike bewildered and bewitched.

"I wish Mrs Cornford had to go after her frames every lesson-day," she said, surprised into a sudden fit of demonstrativeness.

"What would papa say? You know Mrs Cornford is an artist of repute, and I am—nobody."

"Nobody!" cried Laura, deprecatingly; "O Miss Silver!"

"Well, I've no money; and I'm not married, and I don't do anything clever; which means that I am nobody in this world, little Laura."

Laura painted away somewhat sadly. Kitty continued, with sentiment—

"But tell me about yourself, dear. Mrs Cornford says that you live in a beautiful place in the country. How I envy you the blue skies and green trees! and I dare say you keep pony-carriages, and big dogs, and all sorts of delicious things."

"The place isn't like what it once was," Laura answered. "Everything has gone to rack and ruin since mamma died."

"But have you no aunt or elder sister to look after you?"

"The boys are at school, and I am the eldest of the girls," Laura said; "and when we are at home we all do just as we like."

"Poor little thing! I wish I were your elder sister, to put everything straight and make you all happy; that is just what I should like to do, Laura."

"And I wish"—

In the middle of her sentence the young girl broke down and blushed.

"And you wish—what?" asked Kitty, sharply.

But Laura hesitated, and could not be brought to finish her sentence. Then Kitty tried what coaxing and cajoling would do: she put her arm round her waist, she kissed her, she pressed her hand. At last Laura confessed that she wished, oh! how she wished, she might invite Kitty down for the holidays; but papa so disliked having strangers in the house, that she feared even to mention it to him. Miss Silver seized upon the idea as a cat plumps upon a mouse.

"It wouldn't be half the treat for you to have me that it would be for me to come," she cried. Then falling into her old sentimental strain, she added: "Let us fancy I am going down into the country with you, Laura, dear; we should play at

croquet on a beautiful smooth lawn, and drive to see the hounds meet in a pony-carriage, and listen to the nightingales in the woods, and walk across the fields to church in muslin frocks, as people do in novels. I should like it for once. I've always lived a London, poverty-stricken, struggling life, and it makes me feel a hundred years old, as ugly as Cinderella's sister, and out of temper with everybody."

"Papa goes away in the autumn," Laura said, brightening suddenly; "we do as we like then, Miss Silver. Will you come and see me—I mean, me and Regy, and Clevy, and little Prissy, and all?"

Miss Silver's handsome face clouded over with thought for an instant, then beamed with smiles. "You kind, thoughtful darling!" she cried, "will I come? of course I will; and now tell me about Regy, and Clevy, and little Prissy, and all."

Kitty listened to a heap of prattle about Regy, who went to Eton, and was one of the winners in the last boat-race; and Clevy, who went to Harrow, and minded nobody; and little Prissy, who was spoiled by every one, and wouldn't go to school; and Wattie, the baby, who was six years old, and could ride, and fish, and do everything.

"And papa—what does he do?" asked Kitty.

"But you won't see papa."

"My darling," said Miss Silver, handling her mouse a little cavalierly, now that she was more certain of it, "there are a hundred and fifty things that may spoil this pretty little scheme we have been hatching up, so we may as well make it as impossible as we like."

Laura didn't quite understand what Miss Silver was driving at, and her face said so plainly.

"Why, you silly child," Kitty cried, "your papa might come home unexpectedly, and find me with you, or I might arrive just before he started; but if I never see him in the course of my mortal life, I should like to know what the father of my little Laura is like."

"But it is so difficult for me to say what papa is like," Laura answered, leaning her head upon her hand, and painting away

at random. "He reads a great deal, makes chemical experiments, takes long walks alone, and never has his beard cut."

"A lucid description!" Kitty said with good-natured satire.  
"Is that all?"

"You are laughing at me, I know," Laura said, humbly.  
"But really I know very little about papa. When we go home for the holidays, he travels, and whenever I have chanced to be at home for a quarter, on account of measles or hooping-cough, he has given me everything I wanted, and just seen me once or twice a-day. I think it rather bothers papa having so many children."

"Well it may," Kitty said without thinking.  
"But we couldn't help being born. I don't think it ought to bother papa."

"It ought not, dear child, and I daresay it does not really; only men are such helpless creatures in domestic matters; that they always make mountains of molehills. I've no doubt that you could manage the house ten times better, young as you are."

"Wattie kicks me if I try to manage him," poor Laura answered; "and Prissy goes and tells tales to nurse, and Regy and Clevy tease me. Nobody knows how I dread leaving school."

What with all this talking, the Indian jar remained very much as Mrs Cornford had left it; and when the clock struck, Laura crimsoned with dismay.

"I must go, because we have a dancing-lesson this afternoon. Oh! what will Mrs Cornford say?"

"Never fear! I'll take all the blame upon myself," Kitty said; and pupil and mistress parted after an affectionate kiss. When the child had gone, Kitty still sat over the picture, brush in hand, and in this attitude Perry found her half an hour after.

The young man rushed in as if he had been a cannon-ball shot through the wall, and without any ado, seized Miss Silver by the hand, and forced her into a waltz.

"They're sold! they're sold, Kitty!" he said; "big picture,

little picture, pot-boilers and all ; and now I've got enough to pay my debts and buy a wedding-ring, and give a spread to all the fellows at the 'Star and Garter.'

When Kitty could release herself, she made him sit down beside her, and listen to a little sermon.

" You are very clever, Perry," she said, " and I am very fond of you, and we are to be married some day—that's settled. But I want you to understand my view of married life, and when you do, you won't vex me by talking like a baby, as you did just now. You have just got enough money to pay your debts, and to buy a wedding-ring, and give a spread, as you call it—which means, I suppose, that when you have cleared yourself, you will have twenty pounds in your pocket. Suppose we marry to-morrow"—

" By Jove! I should wish for nothing better," cried Perry, trying to kiss her hand.

" Be quiet, sir, and listen to me. We eat our feast at Richmond, and come back to live in this hole : I, with hardly a decent gown to my back ; you, with one coat off and one on, and both out at elbows (I've mended them many a time,—so there's no denying the fact). For a little while it would be all very well. And I do not say that we should come to a cat and dog life at all, but I think we should be wretched ; you do not look into the future as I do, and see little clouds and big clouds and monstrous clouds rising out of the distance to break over our unfortunate heads. There would be dirt, debt, and dejection ; in time, ill-temper, and a hundred thousand ignoble little stinging troubles. I don't think you will ever make a great fortune"—Kitty said this rather sadly—" though you are a genius, my poor Perry ; but genius without good sense is like a gold coin you can't get change for. I have good sense and no genius, but I know you would never be guided by me." Here Perry tried to interrupt her, but she continued, " Now I will tell you my ideal of married life. Don't look alarmed. I don't crave anything extravagant. I only crave respectability. I want a little semi-detached house to ourselves in Kensington, and two or three neat maids, and a little plate, and a little

wine-cellar well filled, and a new silk dress once or twice a year. Is that a dream of Utopia ?

"It's a dream of six hundred a year," said Perry, his hands in his pockets, and his face very gloomy.

"Well, if a man hasn't stuff in him worth six hundred a year, he's not the person to suit me," said Miss Silver, firmly ; then, with an appearance of yielding a little, she added, "Perry, life is short ; why not enjoy it ?"

"That's just what I think. Hang it, Kitty, let's send care to the dogs, and marry to-morrow. I'm sure we shall be happy."

But Kitty stuck to the letter of her text, and he could not move her by a hair's breadth. It was impossible for two people to love each other and be happy upon less than six hundred a year.

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## CHAPTER II.

KITTY was, in truth, growing tired of Bohemia. She had been born in it, and reared in it ; she had eaten "its paper, and drunk its ink ;" she had only at rare intervals overstepped its boundary line ; but she no longer loved it. Those occasional wanderings into the kingdom of gentility had not been without effect, and, like the ambitious child of a vagabond mother, she now turned upon the hands that had fed her and taught her to walk.

But to get out of Bohemia into the kingdom of gentility, was the difficult point. Here she was as welcome as the flowers in May to everybody's crust and everybody's chimney-corner ; she had a dozen lovers, a dozen adopted fathers and mothers, a dozen bosom friends. There, she knew that she would be a scapegoat and a stranger, having to pay for bare board and bread and water by some labour of her hands. What knight would pay court to her ? What men and women would love her as their own child ? What ladies would con-

descend to become her friends in the country she thirsted for, as Christian for the Delectable Mountains? Poor Kitty! she looked into her glass, ready to smite her own portrait.

"What good does it do one to be handsome here or anywhere if one is poor? Amongst our people Polly Cornford is liked as well as I, and she is by no means beautiful. If I donned respectability, and went out as a governess, who would do me a good turn for having a face fit for a queen? What a pity there isn't a massacre of the Innocents in Bohemia once in a while—I mean of the girls—for then I should never have known what it is to be a woman and hate it," and Kitty would sit down, biting a long curl of her dark hair viciously, and think.

She had no visible kith nor kin, but her genealogy was good, and shone quite splendidly when occasion required, that is to say, outside Bohemia. Her family came in with the Conquerer, a position which no one feels able to dispute; one ancestor had fallen on Flodden Field, and that, too, would be an incontestable fact to most people. Her great-grandfather, Sir Hugh Silver, had been disinherited by an unjust father, had died a beggar, and the family estates had passed into other hands, in default of male heirs. Was there any reason why there should not have been a Sir Hugh Silver, and why Sir Hugh Silver should not have been Kitty's great-grandfather, and why Sir Hugh Silver should not have been disinherited by an unjust father, and why the family estates had not passed into other hands, in default of male heirs? None in the world; and if we do not sometimes blow our little trumpets, who will blow them for us? Kitty's genealogy was her ewe-lamb of a triumph, and she hugged it and kept it warm, and would not have forsaken it for worlds.

As in Bohemia Proper, that is to say, Gypsydom, one pays no taxes, so in Bohemia Moral one enjoys many unqualified exemptions. Propriety costs other things as well as money. The respectable man has to pay for the defalcations of his kindred. If his brother forges a bill, he is not thought fit for decent society. If his father fails dishonourably, who will

look upon him as a man to be trusted ? The respectable woman pays four-fold for the sins of her blood. Who would not rather die than be the daughter of an unfaithful wife, or the wife of an unlucky man, or, worse still, the mother of a vicious son ? Putting the secret shame out of the question, how sorely are the teeth of respectable people set on edge because their fathers have eaten sour grapes !

And how dearly do we pay for such crimes as a lean look, a shabby coat, an empty purse ! If we have well-filled wine-cellars and butteries at home, we are teased to dine out every day ; if we wear shining cloth and rustling silks, there is not a tailor or a milliner who would not rejoice to trust us ; if we are supposed to be well off, what so easy as to borrow money ? In Bohemia there is no injustice of this sort. If your friends fall into ill-luck or evil ways, it is none the worse for you—a little the better, since kind deeds are showered upon your head as if you were a bride or a hero. Show the hole in your coat, and some one will take off his own and clothe you in it. The last crust of bread will be brought out to you ; the last sixpence will be shared with you.

A man is always a brother ; a woman always a sister in Bohemia.

Kitty knew all this, and it gave her matter for serious thought. It did her no harm to be poor and friendless here ; but how would it be in the great respectable world beyond ? She pondered and pondered, and came to no conclusions. One moment she said to herself, "How dull it would be out there ; no merry supper parties ; no vagabond trips to Paris ; no *cafés chantant* ; no shrimp teas at Greenwich, but instead, sermons twice every Sunday, and so on ;—how dull it would be !" Another moment and it was, "But I'm sure I'm not fond enough of Perry to live with him in Mrs Cornford's two-pair back. Oh dear ! oh dear ! if Perry's brains or mine were only worth six hundred a year !"

She had already tried various manœuvres to serve two masters, to obtain a footing in the land of respectability without forfeiting her usufruct in Bohemia ; but that would not

do. She found disloyalty to be the only unpardonable sin amongst her people, and abandoned it, seeing that, as yet, no other people welcomed her. Happy mediums are unknown theories to your true Bohemians, which is but natural. Bohemia itself is the very creation and expression of extravagance, and by extravagance alone does her kingdom stand.

In this stage of her career it occurred to Kitty to make the acquaintance of Mrs Cornford's pupils; but at present nothing had come of them. There was one handsome girl, a Miss Beckford, whose father was a rich hog's-bristle merchant, living at Wandsworth, of whom Miss Silver at one time entertained hopes. Julia Beckford was a fast young lady, and wanted to get into Bohemia fully as much as Kitty wanted to get out. The friendship of the two girls grew up like a mushroom.

Miss Julia met Kitty, Perry, and one of Perry's friends one evening, *sub rosa*, and went to one of the small theatres. Miss Julia confided to Kitty that she would elope with Perry's friend any moment. Kitty was invited to Wandsworth, when all at once, no one could tell how it happened, Miss Julia was sent off to Brussels with a frigid aunt, and Bohemia knew her no more. There was another young lady of the poetic, phlegmatic kind, who adored Kitty at first sight, and showed her adoration in a hundred acceptable ways, giving her ribbons, gloves, chocolate, and knick-knacks.

This girl had not the faintest notion of what Bohemia meant, but she lived in a dull, methodistical atmosphere at home, and the little unconventionalities of Paradise Place delighted her. So simple was she, that Mrs Cornford would correct her drawing,—cigarette in mouth,—and would allow Perry to come into the studio for anything he wanted, when, of course, the young man would stop for a little enthusiastic talk with the ladies, and would recite verses from Byron or Shelley, which he did excellently; or play an air of Schubert's on the piano, which he did better still. There is nothing so intoxicating as enthusiasm to a sensitive, incapable nature; and it was quite

new to Fanny Robins to hear blue skies and poets talked of instead of the bad doings and lost souls of servants ; happy shadows, and graceful lines, instead of puddings and bonnets ; and to find a joyful, inconsequent pantheism taking the place of hard words about a state of grace and future burning.

Fanny Robins would have been just the ally Kitty needed, but for one thing. She had no brains. Kitty would drop hints plain enough to lodge upon an intellect no broader than the blade of a sixpenny knife ; they slipped off Fanny's as if it had been greased. Kitty would try plain, unvarnished truths with no better success.

For instance, she said one day, " You say that you love me, Fanny, and would like to make me happy. You can easily do that. You are an only child, and your parents are well off. Persuade them to let me live with you as your governess, companion, and friend. What more should I want than to be always with my darling ? "

And the next week, Fanny came looking utterly miserable. In a moment her childish story was sobbed out. " I asked mamma, and mamma said I was a little fool ; and, O Kitty ! I can't live without you."

All this Kitty heard very grimly, and though she accepted poor little Fanny's gewgaws, she took less trouble about her for the future. She even forgot to kiss her sometimes, when Fanny would go home and write sad little stanzas with the help of a rhyming dictionary. Seeing that two promising fish had slipped away from the bait, Kitty threw out more line, and watched patiently for a third, which proved to be Laura. Whilst Laura hovered round the hook, now coming near enough for a nibble, now plunging a yard or two back, things went on right merrily among Kitty's people. Mr Perugino Neeve (thus named by his father, himself an artist, by way of happy presage), not prevailing upon Kitty to marry, spent his money instead. He did not pay his debts.

" Having waited so long, the people can wait a little longer," he said ; " and by George, it's hard for a fellow to work hard for fifty pounds, and spend it upon butchers' and bakers' bills ;

if I owed that money for works of art it would be quite another matter."

Accordingly, he put off the butcher and baker with fair words, and laid out his money upon a very beautiful old carved oak cabinet for his studio, a new dress for Kitty, and such items as gloves, whisky, and Sunday suppers to the ladies. Perry congratulated himself a great deal more upon the spending of his money than the earning of it. With him to spend a five-pound note, no matter how, was an achievement, and when it was spent he set himself soberly to earn some more, borrowing in the meantime where he could.

Kitty tried again and again to make him economical, sometimes using rather strong words.

"You're such a goose," she would say, "that I can't respect you, Perry; try ever so much, I can't respect you. Only the other day you had the opportunity of clearing yourself, and becoming respectable. What did you do? Whilst those horrid people kept dunning you, and your pockets were full of money, you must choose to buy cabinets and ivory carvings, which will neither feed us nor clothe us."

"You lecture me just like a wife, Kitty," said poor Perry, humbly; "and if you were my wife I should mind you,—I should really."

"I don't believe a word of it; but if people could be married as servants are hired,—for a month upon trial,—we might make the experiment."

"Kitty, that's being too hard upon me."

"I should not be hard upon you unless I were fond of you, and wished to see you all that you might be," Kitty answered, soothingly. "Dear boy, do listen to reason. Save a five-pound note, only one, and you will find saving money quite easy after that. You are the person in the world who cares most for me, and what can your caring for me avail whilst you are penniless?"

This speech was like a kindly pat on the shoulder, accompanied by a sharp blow on the cheek. Perry did not know how to take it.

"Don't be mercenary," he said.

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"I am not mercenary ; I only want you to do the best you can for yourself. People must either go backwards or forwards in life ; and if you love me, you must go forward. I wish to be proud of my husband."

Perry was in raptures.

"There never was a girl like you, Kitty ; and I only wish I were an A.R.A., so that you could be proud of me."

"Well. Many an A.R.A. has had a humbler beginning than you, I 'll be bound ; but Rome was not built in a day, and I expect no impossibilities from you, to begin with."

"I think I shall be quite rich in a year's time," Perry said, very seriously, "and you will see that I have reckoned upon nothing improbable ; I have got, as you know, orders for two pictures,—one for twenty-five, another for forty pounds ; that makes sixty-five. I shall paint these pictures so well that I 'm morally sure to have orders for companion subjects."

Kitty pulled him up sharply.

"Why are you sure ?" she said.

"Why ? well I 'm just as sure as I am of getting my dinner to-morrow."

"There is no moral certainty about that," Kitty added ; "but go on."

And Perry went on.

"Twice sixty-five pounds make a hundred and thirty, and that, you know, will be gained in little more than two months' time ; what I can do in June and July, I can do in August and September ; what I can do in August and September, I can do in October and November"—

"That 's enough by way of illustration," Kitty interposed ; "don't go on for ever, like Sancho Panza counting the sheep."

"Reckon it which way you please, my income for the next twelve months can be neither more nor less than seven hundred and eighty pounds a year."

Seven hundred and eighty pounds a year ! The very thought of this so elated Perry, that he took the liberty of kissing Miss Silver.

Kitty resented this, and resented the speech that had occasioned it.

"What a big baby you are!" she said with impatience. "Seven hundred and eighty pounds a year!—what nonsense to talk in this strain. Show me the odd eighty in your hands like this," she added, taking from her pocket a handful of half-pence and closing her fingers tight over them, "and I shall begin to believe in the rest. But your wealth is so sadly imaginary, my poor Perry—so sadly, recklessly imaginary."

"Everybody's wealth is imaginary, if you come to that," Perry answered, quite seriously. "If I were a bloated capitalist, my money would all be invested, and no investments are safe for a day; if I were a banker, my confidential clerk would be likely to turn out a scoundrel; if I belonged to the upper ten thousand, and had the title of lord, and plenty of lands, they might be so mortgaged as to keep me as poor as a curate. Talk to me as you will, Kitty, the only real and dependable capital is the capital of brains."

"Are you sure that you've got guarantee shares in that stock?" Kitty asked, a little doubtfully.

"Kitty!"

"Don't look aggrieved without occasion; I know that you can paint well when you like, and that all the big-wigs look upon you as their Benjamin of brushes; but I doubt sometimes whether you possess your full share of downright common sense; and common sense is the thing to live and be happy upon, though your great geniuses so despise it."

"The first shall be last and the last first," Perry said; "if the material things of the world are put before the intellectual, the whole being becomes coarse and common. We don't despise eating and drinking, Kitty, but we think a beautiful bit of colour more necessary"—

Kitty jumped up and started off.

"Have it all your own way," she said, laughing. "I don't quarrel with you for loving beautiful bits of colour better than eating or drinking; but my being, for one, is coarse and common, and it is necessary, under the circumstances considered, that you take that fact into consideration."

"*I should think it is necessary,*" Perry said, with satisfaction;

and as soon as Kitty had left the studio, he set to work at his "pot-boiler," in right good earnest. He had painted zealously for an hour or two, and was lazily enjoying a novel and a cigar in an arm-chair, when he heard footsteps in the passage. In the twinkling of an eye, the novel and cigar were thrust aside, and the maulstick and palette were taken up.

"Come in, Kitty; give the devil his due!" Perry called out; but instead of Kitty, the door was opened a few inches wide, and in were thrown two pairs of Kitty's boots.

It was Perry's happy office to black Miss Silver's boots, which he did so well that you would have thought he had been brought up as a boots all his life. Kitty had a beautiful foot, small and perfectly shaped, and Perry handled her shabby shoes as if they had been the golden sandals of Artemis. He wanted nothing better than to black those worn-out little shoes all the days of his life—not at all able to understand Kitty's ambition. "I can't think how it is," he mused, "that not one woman out of twenty but is spoiled by prudence—not that Kitty is spoiled; she's a splendid creature, and an exception; but even her prudence has the upper hand of her affections. Why in the world shouldn't we marry, and send care to the devil at once?"

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### CHAPTER III.

IT was a very gay summer in Bohemia. By the end of July, Kitty's one gala dress; Perry's gift, had been worn so often that it was faded past recognition; Kitty's bonnet, Perry's gift too, baffled all her womanly cunning at restoration. Kitty's gloves, of course her gloves were always Perry's gifts, were no more. One cannot have one's cake and eat it, and Kitty had enjoyed Perry's cake to the utmost; but what was to be done now that every crumb of it was eaten? She had so thoroughly rated him about extravagance that she determined to accept no more of his gifts unless absolutely necessary. She knew Mrs

Cornford to be terribly short of money, and she had, moreover, saddled herself with three orphan nieces of late, so that common humanity forbade any appeal in that quarter; and as Mrs Cornford was considered a sort of millionaire in the little circle, it may be imagined Kitty looked far and wide for help, and despaired of it. There was one particular friend of hers, an old Polish refugee, named Petroffsky, who was a teacher of languages, and earned about fifty pounds a year. Kitty thought of him. Papa Peter, as she called him, is always giving me cakes and sweetstuff: she reflected what harm would there be in telling him that she would rather have a yard or two of ribbon once a year than all the cakes in the world! Accordingly, the next time she went to take tea with Papa Peter, and mend his stockings for him whilst he played the flute, she said, "Papa Peter, you are not to give me any more gingerbread-nuts or sugar-plums, under pain of my everlasting displeasure."

"Now, you do ask me a thing impossible," Papa Peter said, blushing and looking more disconcerted than the occasion should seem to warrant; "not to give my beautiful Catherine *gâteaux* and *bonbons!* *va t'en, mauvais enfant;*" and that very moment he took out of his pocket a packet of cakes, and put it into her own. Kitty said, after a little while,—

"I will tell you what you shall give me, Papa Peter—every year a little something or other to wear: only a yard of pink ribbon to tie up my hair is more useful than a ton-weight of toffee, much as I like it, you know." And Kitty coaxed and cajoled him, and let out, little by little, the terrible state of her wardrobe. It set Petroffsky thinking. This handsome young girl was the only being left to love and to love him in the world, and all her gowns and shoes were worn out. It was hard that he should do nothing for her when she mended his clothes so nicely, and was so fond of hearing him play the flute! And she did not care for the sweetmeats which he had earned by giving lessons in French to the pastrycook's little daughter over the way! He felt greatly mortified, but he was a Pole, and had a soul above despair; so when Kitty was

gone, he thought the matter over for half an hour, and came to a conclusion. He saw no reason why French lessons should not be exchanged for millinery, as they had hitherto been exchanged for cakes. Accordingly he wrote out the following advertisement, and carried it that same evening to the *Chelsea Halfpenny Times* :—

“To MILLINERS.—A distinguished foreign professor will give lessons in French and German in exchange for a bonnet and mantle. Address—Professeur, care of Mrs Chumps, green-grocer, Middle Row, Chelsea.”

And as luck would have it, a milliner’s apprentice at Hammersmith, fired with the desire of parlezvousing and obtaining a situation in Paris, answered Papa Peter’s advertisement. A very satisfactory arrangement was entered upon, by which Miss Sarah Ann Sykes agreed to furnish a fashionable bonnet in return for ten lessons; but the girl was dull, and poor Petroffsky repented him of his bargain.

How many repetitions of “*Quelle heure est-il?*” “*Que faites-vous?*” “*Où allez-vous?*” and such phrases had to be given before the strings of the bonnet could fairly be said to be earned; and then there were Perrier’s first two fables and the verb *être* to roll up and down like Sisyphus’ stone, to pay for the flowers and lace. Whenever a lesson came to an end, Petroffsky would say, “*Et mon chapeau, mademoiselle, ça doit être bien beau, n'est-ce pas?* My bonnet, mees, is he fine, is he achieved?” bowing her out with a grand air.

The little girl was honest, but hard, and when the ten lessons came to an end, she declared that she had bargained ill for herself. She expected to have understood French as well as her instructor by the end of the tenth lesson, and she wrangled and haggled till the old Pole consented to give her five additional lessons. And the verb *être* and Perrier’s first two fables were rolled up-hill and down-hill for five weary hours more, as Miss Sykes said, “to find the cap and drops.” Petroffsky no more knew what the cap and drops meant than if she had spoken Welsh; but when the bonnet came at last,

he was delighted, and wanted to enter into negotiations for a mantle. Miss Sykes shook her head. "The ingredients were too expensive," she said; "she could furnish a winter bonnet, or little things like neck ribbons and collars, but nothing else."

No little things were agreed upon, and the lessons commenced.

Petroffsky could not bring himself to wait till Kitty's day to visit him, but carried off his treasure to Paradise Row at once. He found the little community in great confusion. Mrs Cornford had turned her back drawing-room into a laundry, and was washing away with a sort of relish delightful to behold; the three nieces were picking to pieces a bit of crimson velvet costume; the kitchen door stood open, and disclosed Perry in his shirt sleeves making damson tarts.

Mrs Cornford looked round at Petroffsky, smiling at his perplexity. "Tell him all about it, Tommie, Binnie, Mimi, one of you," she said. "I can't stop."

The elder girl had just begun an explanation in a high key, when Kitty came down, flushed with pleasure and business, and asking a hundred questions at once, such as "Tommie, have you fetched the pins?" "Binnie, you said I might take your lace collar, didn't you?" "Mimi, have you washed my hair-brush?" The sight of Petroffsky seemed to bore her, and she was about to plead an excuse and run up-stairs again, when he undid the tissue paper, and displayed the hardly-worn bonnet. In a moment Kitty had her hands clasped round his arm, and was smiling up into his face as a woman smiles at her lover.

"You old darling!—you good kind Papa Peter," she said, and she would have kissed him if he had not been too shy to divine her willingness; "how I love you for being so good to me! And it's so lucky, too. But you shall see how I look in it."

New bonnets are events in Bohemia, and the news of it spread like wildfire through the place, bringing in Perry covered with flour and damson juice, the Miss Bianchis,

young ladies next door, who were photographers, and a host of miscellaneous admirers. Kitty had to "walk to the door" again and again before everybody's curiosity was satisfied, and Petroffsky's thin old face flushed with pride at the praise his gift received.

"I can't stop to talk to you now, because I'm so busy," Kitty said, hurrying away bonnet in hand, "for I'm invited to stay with some grand people in the country, and go the day after to-morrow; but you must come to my farewell supper to-morrow at eight o'clock. Good-bye."

With that she went up-stairs. When she had found a safe place for her bonnet, which was no easy matter, she took up a letter, and read it for the hundredth time. The letter was written in a school-girl's hand, and ran thus:—

"SHELLEY HOUSE, HUBST END, KENT,  
"August 30, 185—

"MY DEAREST MISS SILVER,—I hope you are quite well, and papa hopes that you will come down to stay with me during this vacation. Regy hopes that you will ride the bay mare; and papa's compliments, and he will send Henry, our man, to the station to meet you, if you will let us know by what train you will come. Do, do come as soon as possible. I have been so miserable for fear lest papa would not let me invite you.—I am, darling Miss Silver, your devoted friend,

"LAURA."

This letter had made Kitty's attic a bright place. She laughed at the difficulties in the way, such as want of money, clothes, and the stereotyped manners of society, and resolved to go and conquer. She could neither talk, nor ride, nor play croquet, as all well-educated young ladies do; she had no father to whom she could go for a ten-pound note to pay her travelling expenses; she had not even a box to pack her clothes in, supposing the possession of clothes to carry. But wit is worth more than gold, and Kitty had wit of the right kind, bright, clear, and plentiful as the waters of a spring.

The first point to settle was that of money. Kitty knew exactly what she could do out of Bohemia and what she could not, and she recognised travelling by third-class as one of the latter. She counted the cost of a first-class ticket to Tunbridge, of porters' fees, of a fly, supposing the carriage to fail her, of a little pocket-money at Shelley House, and she said to herself that she could not do all this without obtaining five pounds. In respectable society a young lady like Kitty Silver might find it very difficult to borrow five pounds; but every one lends and borrows in Bohemia, and nobody expects security.

Kitty was universally popular, and she borrowed the money easily—half a sovereign here, half a sovereign there, till her purse was plump. The second point to settle was that of clothes. The whole female community possessed but one silk dress, and that dress Kitty determined to have. It belonged to Mrs Cornford—that is to say, it belonged to Mrs Cornford more than it did to anybody else, though there was not a lady of her acquaintance who had not either been married in it, been bridesmaid in it, danced in it, gone to christenings in it. It was a very Wandering Jew of dresses, for no one could remember its beginning, still less could any one prognosticate its decay; since it possessed that happy quality of never looking the worse for wear.

One day Kitty put her arms round Mrs Cornford fondly, and said she had a favour to ask of her—such a favour—it was so great that she lacked the courage to mention it! Mrs Cornford laughed good-naturedly, and put her away.

"You little artful thing," she said, "out with it. By the time you are fairly off to see these grand folks, I shan't have a stocking left to my feet."

Kitty looked down almost tearful with contrition.

"I really won't be such a selfish monster, Polly," she said; "I can't."

Then of course good-natured Mrs Cornford got the truth out, and the dress was placed at Kitty's service to take to Shelley House.

The other things necessary for her outfit were got together—no matter how ; and as every hour brought her departure nearer, Kitty's spirits rose. Well they might. Fate had commanded her to make bricks without straw, and had she not made them ? With regard to the last point, namely, the stereotyped manner that makes the Shibboleth of society, she felt a little uneasiness still, but she determined to pass off as an exceptional young lady,—a serious, dreamy young lady,—with a soul above croquet,—an ingenuous, romantic young lady, who had been brought up out of the world, and knew little of its observances.

The farewell supper was a grand success, except in Kitty's eyes ; for so rapt was she in anticipation of the coming visit, that everything else bored her. But she looked very bright and handsome as she sat by Perry's side, and all the men were ready to shed tears at the thought of losing her. Who else in their little circle could boast of half her wit, her beauty, and her bewitching vivacity ? The ladies, too, were unequivocally sorry, for Kitty was not a coquette ; and though she kept Perry in a fever of alternate happiness and despair, her cleverness and good looks had victimised no one else. Kitty, to tell the truth, seemed a little cold-hearted, where men were concerned, to warm-hearted women like Polly Cornford and the little photographers next door. They seemed to have formed themselves in a sort of Mutual Protection of Men Society, taking under motherly or daughterly care half a score of broken-down artists, authors, and musicians, to whom they lent money, and for whom they toiled and span, whilst Kitty's only protégé, Papa Peter, received little at her hands except affection. But she was a favourite, nevertheless. So Kitty's supper, which Mrs Cornford and Perry had provided, was eaten, and Kitty's health was drunk with unmitigated relish.

As the supply of glass and crockery was short, the ladies were helped first, and the plates were turned on the reverse side for the gentlemen, and the glasses divided in this way,—one each for the single, and one between the married,—while knives, forks, and spoons were drawn lots for after everybody had been helped. The last arrangement was provocative of

much merriment, as the possessor of a fork was sure to have chosen a custard, and so on.

When the dishes were almost cleared, and the bottles of various shapes were almost emptied, Perry, Kitty, and the three orphan nieces slipped out of the way, no one being rude enough to comment upon the act. About a quarter of an hour later, there was a sound of tambourines, castanets, and flutes on the stairs; the door was thrown open, and a wonderful thing was seen.

First came Perry and Kitty dressed as Antony and Cleopatra,—the former wearing white tunic bordered with purple, and purple pallium trimmed with gold, sandalled and crowned with roses,—the latter in a Greek dress, white robe and saffron poplin, close braided hair and golden fillets. Both wore garlands round their necks, after Egyptian fashion, and carried white lilies (lotus flowers not being attainable) in their hands. Next came the three orphan nieces and the little maid-of-all-work dressed like slaves, with sphinx-like braids of falling hair, winged head-dresses, arms, face, and throat painted a deep brown, and wearing long, close-fitting linen garments, and necklaces and amulets of blue beads. The foremost bore a huge dish, on which lay a roast peacock (it was a Cochin China fowl) with shining, outspread tail, the hindmost keeping up a lively noise with tambourine, castanets, and flute.

What followed is easy to imagine. The "Huzzas" and "Bravos" were heard to the other end of the street, and the applause did not end here.

There was a universal "Ave imperator," and a bending of the knee. All the men wanted to kiss Cleopatra's hand, all the ladies had a rose to offer Antony; and if it had not been for his concern about the so-called peacock getting cold, the mummery would have lasted for hours.

"If ever grace was said before peacock it ought to be said now," Perry said, "for thereby hangs a tale. Twice this unhappy bird has been painted—you will see its portrait on the walls of the Academy—once photographed, once it has served as model for a wood-carving, and once it has been lent out for

a neighbour's supper, on express conditions that it was not to be eaten."

When nothing was left of the fowl but his bones and his tail, the party began to break up. Of what use to stay? Any other dish, however choice, would have been like gilding refined gold, and any other joke like painting the lily. Your true Bohemian is always an epicure, and Kitty's guests did not outstay their welcome, but went away as soon as her feast had been eaten, her wine drank, and her hospitality honoured. As soon as the room was cleared, Perry began to praise the company. What capital things A. had said! What good songs B. had sung! How pretty C. had looked! How thoroughly D. had entered into the spirit of everything!

Kitty yawned.

"All your geese lay golden eggs, Perry," she said, "and such big ones, too! The people were nice enough, and the party was nice enough, but I don't think anything in the world is worth such unmitigated praise, excepting Polly Cornford, because she dresses up other poor birds in her fine feathers, and you, because you made me such a beautiful box to carry my clothes in to Shelley House."

"If you were only not going there."

"O Perry!"

"I didn't mean to say anything that sounded selfish, Kitty. God knows that!—but you are so impressible, that I don't feel sure you will come back the same Kitty you go away."

"Kitty will come back a fine lady, that is what the stars tell me," Mrs Cornford said; "Kitty will never relish our vagabond life any more, and she won't marry you, Perry, unless things alter strangely, mark my word!"

Kitty took up her candle to go to bed.

"Good night," she said, holding a cheek to each; "I leave you to settle my affairs between you."

But Perry followed her into the passage, and she saw at a glance that some real anxiety prompted the action.

"Kitty," he whispered, eagerly, "you mean to come back

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to me, don't you? You would never let anything or anybody come between us two?"

"Why do you doubt me? It makes me doubt myself," she answered.

"Only wait a little," he went on, breathlessly, "and I will do all that you wish. I have the capability to do it, and I will. Only wait a little, Kitty."

"And that is what I say to you—only wait a little," she said, smiling.

The smile reassured him, and he grew gay again.

"Good night, my Cleopatra," he said.

"Good night," she said.

Why did she not call him Antony?

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## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE NORMANS.*

THERE was quite an excitement in Paradise Place next morning. All the world was occupied with Kitty's departure, from old Petroffsky down to the youngest toddlekins in the street. One was busy in bringing down her luggage; another was brushing her travelling-cloak; a third was running hither and thither to borrow a strap for her rug; a fourth was setting the last stitch in her travelling-dress. At eleven o'clock precisely, old Petroffsky fetched the cab, and at a quarter-past eleven, Kitty tripped down-stairs, airily attired, as befitted the season. Perry followed, looking somewhat dishevelled and disreputable, as usual, and the two drove off, all Bohemia waving its handkerchiefs, kissing its hands, and weeping after them. The cab had fairly turned the street when a wild head peeped in at the window, and something rattled into Kitty's lap.

It was a coral necklace that Mrs Cornford had thought of in the eleventh hour. "Run, Mimi," she cried, "and overtake the cab. Never mind saying anything; she'll know all about it." And Kitty put away the necklace, gratefully, thinking how ornamental it would be, and how much more useful to

her than to Polly Cornford. She made her adieux almost tenderly to Perry, promised to write to him, asked to hear from him, and laughed away his reiterated apprehensions that she would change one iota before she returned. Perry loitered on the platform till the train moved off; and returning to his studio, shut himself up with the intention of painting a dozen pictures before her return.

Kitty leaned back on her comfortable cushions, and, drawing long breaths of the pleasant air, thought it a good thing to be travelling to a wealthy country-house first-class, with a little money in her pocket, and no cares in her heart. She smiled to herself as a child who anticipates a holiday. "How nice it is to do as other people do!" she thought, and she drew down the curtain and fanned herself with quite a grand air. One would have declared that she was some rich lady, having a train of servants in the second-class carriage.

When she alighted at Tunbridge, she ordered a porter to put her luggage into Dr Norman's carriage a little loftily, and swept up and down the platform like any other fashionable young lady. By and by, a tall, gentlemanly youth came up, whip in hand, looked at her, turned away, and looked again.

"Miss Silver?" he said, with a frank smile and a blush.

Kitty smiled most sweetly.

"I'm Regy," he said, and then they shook hands and were good friends. "Papa sent me because Henry was out, but I wished to come, of course," he went on. "Have you much plunder—I mean luggage—and will it all fit in the back-seat of the phaeton?" He pointed to the phaeton, a shabby turn-out, Kitty thought; if everything else is so shabby, I need not have made such ado about my poor wardrobe! and she felt a little offended that they had not sent the family carriage for her. She smiled at Regy, nevertheless, and told him that she was afraid her plunder, as he called it, would not fit in the back-seat of the phaeton.

Then the boy helped her in, taking great care that her pretty skirts were not soiled on the wheels, and thinking all the while what a splendid-looking creature Laura's friend was. They

chatted as they drove through the narrow green lanes, fragrant with the smell of the ripening hop, Kitty quite surprised at her own feeling of youthfulness and ability to discuss unaccustomed subjects; for Regy described school-life, and "larks," and cricket-matches, and his own particular "chums," she listening and talking with interest.

"Miss Silver," the boy said, fired with an unusual ambition of gallantry, "there is to be a lawn-party at the Oakleys tomorrow, and I told Laura I wouldn't go, but if you will I will, and I'll drive you and Laura, and Clevy can sit behind."

Kitty said that she should much like to go to the lawn-party, but that she mustn't give him more of her company than she gave Laura, or the little thing would be jealous.

"Not she," said Regy, with a decided crack of his whip, "for her head will be full of Charley Dawson and Arthur Fanshawe;—a sly little puss is Miss Laura, and such a flirt when your head is turned! There's Shelley House. Isn't it a jolly old place?"

Again Kitty was doomed to disappointment. Shelley House was not the stately, well-kept mansion she had expected, but a large, rambling, old-fashioned manor-house, with a malting-house and granaries on one side, orchards and vegetable gardens on the other, a picturesque paddock in front, broken by clumps of fir-trees, and a background of beautiful beech-woods. What would have charmed any one else was the delicious look of freedom about the place. Nothing seemed bound to keep in its place. There were roses peeping amid the cabbage-beds, raspberry bushes growing on the borders of the lawn, scarlet runners and vines running up the front of the house in company with clematis and westeria, and no apparent routine or rule anywhere; two impudent-looking young heifers had broken into the paddock, and the tame old pony and little goat, on whose territory they had encroached, seemed to enjoy their company.

Hens were dragging their chicks across the gravelled carriage-way as if it was a proper thing to do, and a sagacious old cart-horse leaned his head over the farm-yard fence, and

cropped the sweet, green boughs belonging to the flower-garden, with an air that said, "How nice it is to be here—now nice it is!" Kitty was certainly disappointed. She had looked for a conventional country-house, with smooth-shaven lawns, well-kept conservatories, handsome bay windows with lace curtains, a host of grooms and gardeners, keeping everything in order, and at the sound of carriage wheels, housemaids and footmen running to the door.

Instead of housemaids and footmen, all the children came running out to meet her—Laura glowing with pleasure; Clevy and Watty shy, but curious; little Miss Prissy as anxious to form and declare her opinion of her sister's guest as any of the others. Laura was at first the shyest of all.

"You must come into the breakfast-room and have something to eat," she said, and that was all she found to say. Regy was inclined to monopolise Miss Silver wholly, having made such a good beginning; and, leading the pony to the grass till some one came to take it out, he accompanied the others in-doors. Then poor Kitty was literally assailed by these hospitable young savages, who wanted her to eat this thing and that thing, to come and sit here, to go and look there, to tell them so and so, to promise one this, another that, and so on. Laura sat on one side, her arm round her waist; Prissy persisted in possessing her lap; Watty climbed to the back of her chair, and rocked it in a manner not very pleasant during lunch-time; Regy and Clevy were all but fighting for the privilege of helping her to wine or meat. This sort of thing lasted till Kitty's head ached and cheeks flushed with weariness. What should she do in order to rid herself of her good-natured tormentors? She proposed to Laura that they two should go up to her room and unpack; but the proposal was so jealously received by the boys that, out of regard for her own popularity, she gave it up. Then she suggested a walk round the garden; but Regy wanted to take her in one direction, Clevy in another, Watty in a third; and though their quarrelling was not rancorous, they persisted in disagreeing till Kitty gave up that idea too. She was racking her

brains for some incontestable excuse, when the door opened. "Papa," Prissy cried, and Dr Norman entered. This was the first time in Kitty's life that she had met a gentleman in the full acceptation of the word, and she started to her feet, colouring uneasily. The sudden blush, the involuntary movement and the momentary embarrassment, made her look girlish and graceful, and induced Dr Norman to greet her less formally than he would otherwise have done. He came forward and shook her cordially by the hand, uttered one or two hospitable formularies rather absently, and then sat down to eat his lunch. "What have you got for me, Laura?" he said, surveying the remnants of the meal with quite a contented air; "and, Regy, mind and bring up some of your best wine for Miss—Laura's visitor. I let these children manage the house," he said, turning to Kitty with a smile; "it's the easiest way."

Laura pointed at the different dishes triumphantly. "Miss Silver praised this," she said, "and this, and this—all of them *my* providings."

"Laura, I thought of the tarts," Wattie said, "and helped cook to make them; you shouldn't take the credit of everything."

"The tarts were very nice, Wattie," said Kitty, patting the boy's shoulder.

"Miss Silver calls everything nice," Wattie said; "and I say Miss Silver is nice; don't you, papa?"

"Of course," Dr Norman made answer, still absently; "I wish you would order cook to bring up stale bread, Laura, dear; you will all kill yourselves with indigestion if you go on in this way."

"I forgot things," Laura said, colouring with vexation.

"And, Regy, I don't suppose you know it, my boy, but this claret is the very newest in the cellar, and quite unfit for human drinking; if these terrible children poison you during your stay, Miss Silver, I hope I shall not be indicted by your friends for murder."

"I told Regy he knew no more about wine than a new-born

baby," said Master Clevy; "but he lights a big candle, and goes down the cellar looking as wise as King Solomon."

"If you don't behave yourself, Master Clevy!" Regy exclaimed, authoritatively, "I shall cut off your glass of port at dessert on Sunday, and so I tell you!"

Clevy made a very impolite gesture of defiance, and began a new subject of discussion. Little Prissy looked from one to the other, contracting her little brows and pursing up her rosy lips. "Papa," she said, "shan't you and I be glad when they are all gone back to school?"

Kitty watched this little girl narrowly, and soon saw how matters stood. Prissy was her father's pet. He scolded her sometimes, and he never scolded his other children; but Kitty was clever enough to see that this exceptional harshness was on the surface only, perhaps meant to hide a real partiality. She was unlike her brothers and sister, less vivacious, less demonstrative, less artless in look and manner; and she evidently adored her father, and expected a great deal of adoration in return. Whilst he was calmly eating his uncomfortable meal, she kept by his side, and every plate and glass must pass through her hands.

To please Prissy he did all sorts of things distasteful to him—ate her comfits, nursed her doll, "opened his mouth, shut his eyes, and saw what she should send him," and when he had done, rose and returned to his study, having first bowed to Kitty with a distant air.

"I thought you said that Dr Norman always travelled during the holidays?" Kitty asked of Laura.

"He is going to Norway in a week's time," Laura answered; and her face said that she was glad.

"It's very unkind of you to say papa is going, Laura," Prissy broke in, fiercely, "when you know that I shall be miserable whilst he is away. I shall say Miss Silver is going, for you love her better than papa."

"Prissy!" Laura expostulated, with tears in her eyes.

"Nobody loves papa but I," Prissy went on, "and nobody loves me but papa, and I shall ask him to take me to Norway."

"Shouldn't we all be miserable," said Clevy, pretending to cry. "Miss Silver wouldn't be able to eat, I shouldn't know how to console her, and we should all get skeletons by the time you got back."

Miss Prissy seized her doll, and dashed out of the room at this. Kitty expostulated with the offender.

"Why do you tease the child?" she said; "she's but a baby, after all."

"But she does take so much upon herself!" Clevy replied, a little repentant, nevertheless. "Miss Silver, she tries to rule us all."

"As if you were not able to take care of yourself, without taking refuge in that sort of thing?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Teasing and tormenting. I wish you would amuse me, and leave Prissy alone."

Clevy was immensely flattered, and he wanted to begin amusing her at once. Would she like to go and see his rabbits, or his little pigs, or his boat?

To each Kitty made affirmative answers, but she could not get out yet, she said, as she wanted to write a letter.

"Then I'll go and see that all my things are in nice order," Clevy said, and went away.

When he was gone Regy left Kitty's side, and taking up a book, threw himself into an arm-chair in the farther end of the room. Laura looked at Kitty, and smiled significantly. Kitty saw in a moment that she had made a mistake.

"What an interesting book that must be Regy is reading," she said, after a time.

Regy read on sulkily.

"We must find out the name of that book, Laura. We must put it away under lock and key when you and I have designs upon Regy's time. Oh, dear! I am sorry he is so fond of reading!"

Regy read on.

"You see," Kitty added, very gravely, "I had reckoned upon you and Regy and I getting rid of the children some-

times, and enjoying ourselves quietly ; but if he likes books better than our company, what shall we do ? ”

Regy's jealous fit was giving way. “ I 'm not fond of reading,” he said, “ but you asked Clevy to amuse you, Miss Silver, and I thought I wasn't wanted.”

“ You 're only joking,” Kitty said, “ it 's quite impossible you should mind what I say to a little fellow like Clevy ! ”

Regy looked quite an inch higher that moment, and Kitty felt sure of his allegiance for the future. But she had not yet secured Wattie and Prissy, and before the day was over, what with one vexation and another, wished herself fairly back in Paradise Place. Dr Norman was courteous wherever he encountered her, which was seldom enough ; and the fresh atmosphere of the place, its airiness, its liberty, its cheerful disorder, pleased her. But those terrible children ! Poor Kitty could not sleep for thinking of all the sacrifices she must make to obtain popularity among them all. Laura's childish confidences, Wattie's rough affection, Prissy's caprices, Clevy's overwhelming good-nature, Regy's gallantry, equally bored her, and she saw no way of escape.

She seemed to have slept for an hour or two only, when a loud rapping at the door awoke her.

“ Do get up, Miss Silver,” Regy said ; “ we 've got out the boat, and are going for a row before breakfast—it 's so nice ! ”

For the first time in her life, Kitty made her toilette at six o'clock in the morning ; with what rueful longings and regrets for the undisturbed attic in Paradise Place, may be imagined !

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## CHAPTER V.

KITTY had come down to Shelley House determined to conquer all before her, and ere the first three days of her visit were over she had very fairly succeeded. Every one in the house adored her, except Dr Norman, and with him she felt as much of a stranger

as ever. She had tried various means to drive in "the thin edge of the wedge," as the phrase goes, to interest him, to make him understand her interest in him, to establish some sort of friendliness between them. But as yet she seemed very far from succeeding, and in four days more he was to start for Norway. In spite of his seeming good-nature, Kitty could but think him very unamiable. Having invited her to his house, he ought, at least, to have seen that she was made comfortable and amused. As it was, he left her entirely to the tender mercies of the children, merely playing the part of host by such catechisms as these :

"Regy, have you driven Miss Silver out to-day?" "Clevy, have you got the proper number of croquet-balls, so that you can all play together?" "Laura, I hope, whilst I am gone, you will invite the Fanshawes and the Dawsons, and make Miss Silver as gay as you can,"—and so on.

"Does Dr Norman never go out with you?" Kitty asked Laura one day, rather impatiently.

"He has not gone out nearly so much since mamma died," the child said—"at least not to see our friends. He is very learned, you know, and knows So and so, and So and so,"—here Laura enumerated half a score of scientific men,—“and it isn't likely he would care for our friends. It is very unfortunate for us that papa should be learned!"

"I suppose he still grieves very much for the loss of your mother?" Kitty said.

"Not so much as he did at first," Laura answered, tenderly; "I think he tries to make the house happy now—and we are very happy, arn't we?"

Kitty answered mechanically, and fell into deep thought. She could afford to think about Dr Norman now, having no other subject of concern, and she did think about him in good earnest. He was a learned man, a gentleman, and a recluse; it puzzled her very much to handle such idiosyncrasies as these. She was clever, and had read a good deal, but not the sort of literature that would recommend itself to him; Kitty felt that she had better play the part of an ignoramus altogether. She

was handsome, and passed off for being quite fashionable among a household so simple and unpretending as that of Shelley House ; but Dr Norman seemed to have no eyes, however she might trick out her dark hair with red ribbons, and sweep her long skirts across his path. She was solicitous of his comfort, handing him his slippers and newspaper quietly, and ministering to his comfort in almost unnoticeable ways ; but it was all the same. Kitty would have despaired of making friends with Dr Norman but for one fact—he was a man and she was a woman, and a woman can always make herself necessary to a man, if she pleases, and has opportunity. One day Kitty happened to be alone when Dr Norman came in for his midday meal : he had his early cup of tea in his dressing-room, and breakfasted again at the children's dinner. She rose, not with alacrity, rather with a quiet, humble, sympathetic air, as if she were his waiting-maid, and helped him to wine and meat.

"Don't you trouble," he said, as usual ; but she insisted upon troubling ; and, when she had got him all he wanted, took up her needlework, a doll's dress for Prissy, and said, quietly, almost sadly—

"You should let me have the pleasure of doing such little things for you, since you have been very kind to me."

"In what way have I been kind ?" asked Dr Norman. "I haven't the least idea."

"It was very kind of you to ask me down here," Kitty said, still modestly stitching away at her doll's frock. "I have not many friends, and seldom get asked into the country."

"Then I hope you will come here as often as you like. It's a great pleasure to the children."

"I do think they are fond of me ; and even Prissy lets me do things for her now."

"Oh ! Prissy is always telling me of the wonderful things Miss Silver has done for her ; but you really make yourself a slave to the children. It is nonsense to do that, and when I am away they will lead you a pretty life of it."

"If I can only help to make their holidays happy, I don't mind making myself a slave to them," Kitty answered. "Supposing that I am not wanted at home, and you desire it, I will stay here till you return from Norway."

"It is very good of you," said Dr Norman, heartily; "but do you honestly think you can live in this Babel so long?"

"I don't find it a Babel. I like being with children—when they are nice children—and, besides, Laura and Regy are quite companionable. If you would feel it any comfort to know that I am with them, I will stay till you are home again."

Dr Norman thought the proposition a very amiable one on Kitty's part, and a very expedient one to accept.

"The children never take any harm with the servants to look after them," he said; "but, of course, I would prefer to leave them in charge of a lady like yourself."

Kitty grew radiant.

"I will put Laura's wardrobe in proper order for her return to school, and make Regy and Clevy some new shirts," she went on; "and we will all be good while you are away."

"Do exactly as you like," said Dr Norman, rising from the table; "only be happy. All I ask of my children is to tell the truth and be happy."

"And they are happy," Kitty said, with emphasis.

"I hope so, poor things! but they sadly want a mother to look after them."

And with this, Dr Norman went away. He liked Kitty's simple way of putting the matter of her stay; nothing, he thought, could be more kind or gentlewomanly. There was no doubt that the children wished it; Laura and Regy had thrown out hints more than once, and the younger ones had said at meal-time—"Papa, ask Miss Silver to stay on and on, and never go;" or, "Papa, Miss Silver is not to go away any more at all," and so on. It seemed to him the most sensible arrangement in the world; and he felt greatly indebted to Kitty for suggesting it. Dr Norman having children, loved them, and wished to make them happy; but he was always

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pitying them for being motherless, and blaming himself for not being able to take a mother's care of them. For their own sakes he could have wished that they had never been born. If a mother's care was only a purchaseable thing, he would have purchased it at any price—except one. He could not marry again. He had lost a perfect wife—at least, he had so found her—and he could not marry again. A second marriage seemed to him like writing a parody on a psalm.

As Dr Norman reviewed Kitty's proposal, he thought more and more of what his wife would have been to him now. Regy was as tall as himself. Laura had forsaken short frocks and dolls long ago; in a few years his children would be young men and women, and he had not the faintest notion what to do with them. The boys must make their way in the world, and do no dishonour to his name. The girls must stay with him a little longer, and then marry, and be lost to him too. But who was there to see that all this was well done? Dr Norman's heart failed him as he thought of the future. It was easy to make the children's lives what they ought to be now, whilst they were like so many young animals, requiring plenty of pasture-ground and nothing more; but the time was drawing near when these wild young things must have harness put on them, to do their work in the world; and how would it be then? He was not a domestic man; he had never been adroit at holding a baby, or drawing a child's tooth, and he had not grown more domestic during these years of widowhood. He said to himself that other men would have fulfilled the paternal duty better than he had done, and would have made themselves more acquainted with the individual characters of their children, would have associated themselves more closely with them in little things. It was not in his character to do this. His theory about children began and ended in giving them plenty of breathing space. Having children, he felt that he was in duty bound to have theories about them.

Dr Norman had not a particle of sentimentality in his disposition; he was a widower in spirit and in truth, but he did not dress up his grief, like a Madonna Dolorosa, with flowers

and exotics, and worship it every day. He did not read all the new poems that crop up about love and grief. He despised above all etiquette, the etiquette of the feelings ; so that people called him stern, and believed him to be so. How should it be otherwise ?

But Dr Norman went his way, content that the world should never see a scar which was not nearly healed yet.

During those last few days, before he started for his trip, his children saw a good deal of him.

“ Miss Silver shall not think me a sort of Timon,” he thought ; “ and as I am going away, the sacrifice will only be for a day or two. If I were to be at home all the holidays, it would be the death of me ! ”

So he joined the young people at croquet for ten minutes one day, accompanied them to church another, drove with them to see some ruins on a third ; letting himself be carried about like a tame bear, just where they liked.

It was amusing to see how the children took care of him. Laura made him put on his greatcoat ; Regy would not allow him to drive ; Prissy told him where the grass was dry enough to sit down on, and where it was not. All this made Kitty impatient. She wanted to take care of Dr Norman herself, and he always rebelled against her good offices, whilst he obeyed Prissy as if she had been his wife.

The drive to the ruins was surreptitiously turned by the children into a sort of pic-nic ; and when Dr Norman alighted - he saw two or three young ladies in white frocks moving among the trees, and some of Clevy’s friends boiling a kettle. He would have escaped, but saw no way, so he made a grimace, and swallowed the pill bravely.

Kitty walked up to him, looking very conscious.

“ You mustn’t scold,” she said ; “ we so wanted to have a little fête before you went away, and we knew we must set a trap for you—Prissy said that.”

“ Oh ! Prissy would cheat Mephistopheles himself ! But I’m sorry that the party seems to be all of boys and girls.

Regy and Laura ought to have invited some grown-up people for you."

"It doesn't matter," Kitty said, with that frankness she had already found so acceptable; "I want to have a little talk with you about the children."

"You are very good, I'm sure, to trouble yourself about the children," Dr Norman answered, taking out a cigar—Kitty had more than once begged him to smoke in her presence, and he knew he might do it now. "Suppose we stroll up the hill whilst they prepare their kettledrum?"

Kitty assented, and they set off.

"I was going to ask you about Laura's wardrobe," Kitty went on, very practically. "Symonds, the housekeeper, is far too old to see to it, and the poor child is quite disfigured by the old-fashioned dresses she has bought for her."

"Get her anything she ought to have; I will leave a cheque," Dr Norman answered, anxious to settle the matter in as few words as possible.

"And what is far more important, Dr Norman, I don't feel at all sure that the school you send Laura to is good enough for her."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" Dr Norman groaned. "What a thing it is to have motherless children! I assure you that same school was recommended to me by one of my oldest friends. The child declares herself to be very happy."

"Yes, she is happy enough; but that is not all. I think she has not air enough, nor exercise enough, nor good food enough, for a fast-growing girl."

Dr Norman took longer steps, and looked uneasy.

"She shall not go to school again. She shall keep at home for once and for all, and shall do nothing but eat and run about," he said, evidently scolding himself bitterly. "I never notice children's looks; but I ought to have had her weighed when she went and when she came home. Make her take port wine, Miss Silver."

"Never fear but that Laura does well enough at home," Kitty said, smiling.

"But what to do with her at home? The child mustn't grow up a savage. She can't go to the Sunday School."

"Oh! Dr Norman, there is plenty of time to think about that. A little holiday, more or less, won't do any harm; and, after all, what so important as health?"

"You are right, indeed; and it is very kind and very sensible of you to interest yourself on behalf of my poor little motherless girl."

And they continued this practical friendly talk all the way up-hill and down-hill, discussing Regy's shirts, Clevy's jackets, Wattie's pocket-money, &c. "What a shrewd, unaffected, capable young lady!" thought Dr Norman. "I am sure Laura could not have a better companion!"

Next day he set off for London. Kitty was up betimes, busying herself about the early breakfast and her host's comfort, filling his flask, rubbing up his opera-glass, sewing on his buttons.

"Shall I pack your portmanteau?" she had ventured to say; but he refused; he pretended to be very indignant about the buttons, too; but she laughed at his indignation in such a frank, pleasant way that he left off scolding, and was grateful instead. Then she poured out his tea quite naturally and calmly, and heard his last instructions about the children, and received his cheque for the children's expenses. One would have thought she was Dr Norman's sister-in-law by the friendly tone she took towards him. When the carriage came up, and all the household came out to say adieu, she took Prissy and Wattie by the hand, and ran with them down to the front gate to see papa off. Dr Norman looked back, nodding and waving his handkerchief quite gaily. Never since becoming a widower had he left home under such happy auspices. Even Prissy forbore to cry, and he felt sure that, under Kitty's rule, all would go well.

## CHAPTER VI.

*KITTY EX CATHEDRA.*

OF course all did go well, for Kitty had so determined, and Kitty had a will. Before Dr Norman went away she had said to herself, "I don't mind how much these children trouble and tire me. I don't mind how much Prissy's whims or Regy's jealousies perplex me. If I have to rise at five o'clock every morning to please Regy, to dress fifty dolls a day to please Prissy, I will do it. Laura shall sentimentalise all day and never find me unsympathetic; Clevy shall always find me ready to play draughts or cricket. I shall always have sweets in my pocket for Wattie, and will cut paper horses for him whenever it rains. I will gossip with old Symonds, and make her a grand satin pincushion. I will please all the other maids, and buy them new caps. There isn't a soul in the place I am going to neglect or dissatisfy; and by the time Dr Norman comes home, he shall have Kitty Silver, Kitty Silver, Kitty Silver, dinned in his ears from morning till night."

At first she did not lie on a bed of roses. Nothing is more difficult than to dance to everybody's fiddle, and Kitty had resolved upon dancing to everybody's fiddle. She found that this would cost no little time or tranquillity; but what were time and tranquillity to her in comparison with some other things? Flattery is the golden key that unlocks most minds, and Kitty knew how to handle that key very dexterously, never breaking or hampering a lock, never setting about the task noisily or too much on a sudden. By various devices and expediencies, she managed to make herself necessary to everybody, and—herein lay her crowning piece of cleverness—to make everybody appear equally necessary to her.

The Normans were good children, but they had one fault—they were jealous. They could not love Kitty as other boys and girls would have done, moderately and ready to make another idol on the morrow; but they must love her blindly, impetuously, each craving her love and friendship, each ready

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to quarrel with the other about her most trifling deed or word. At first, it was always thus : " Oh ! Kitty has given you that doll, has she ? Then I shall throw my top away, for I ' m sure the doll cost double ; " or, " Kitty is going to walk to church with you, Master Clevy ! That ' s an idea, indeed ! If she doesn't walk with me, I shall stay at home ; " or, " Kitty is my friend, and you must not always want her company ; " and so on. But Kitty, who combined the wisdom of the serpent with the gentleness of the dove, soon found a remedy for this spirit of captiousness. First, she appealed to their vanity, and next she appealed to their pride. For instance, she would take Regy aside, and say to him : " Regy, you are old enough to be my friend ; and if you do not help me whilst your father is away, I shall go away too. You are not a boy in years ; why do you sometimes make me forget that you are so little younger than I ? I should not have consented to stay unless I had looked upon your society as some little compensation for other things. I love the children, as you know ; but I ' m not a child myself, and they sometimes weary me and dishearten me, loving as they are." And such speeches as these, often accompanied by the glisten of a tear in her eyes, made Regy beside himself with penitence and enthusiasm. It was wonderful to see how much older and taller he seemed to grow in the course of a few weeks. He cared a great deal more for reading aloud to Miss Silver than cricketing with his friends, and grew bold enough to offer her bouquets, to button her gloves, to carry her parasol, to praise her bonnet. Everything Miss Silver did was well done, everything she wore was pretty, everything she said was clever, in Regy's estimation. And what wonder ? Any woman who is gracious and handsome becomes a goddess to boys of eighteen,—and Kitty was very gracious and handsome, people said. Kitty managed Prissy on a wholly different principle. The child lived entirely in her affections, and learned to love very slowly. Kitty could not love her at once, but she determined to love her by rule and rote, and to win her love in return. It is by no means impossible to love by rule and rote, neither is it impossible to make that love appear

bright and good, as electro-plate imitates silver. And Kitty's imitations were always excellent. She compassed the child with sweet observances ; she toiled for her from morning till night ; she was ready to turn the house upside-down to please her. "O Prissy," she said, many and many a time, "I let all the others go in order to make you fond of me, and I am no more to you than I ever was ! Prissy, you would love me if you knew how alone I am in the world. I have no papa, no sisters, no brothers, and yet Prissy won't love me."

It ended by Prissy loving her ; and, after that conquest, Kitty's ways became ways of pleasantness, and her paths paths of peace. Shelley House was nicer than Paradise Place, Kitty thought, as she ruled supreme in it during these balmy days of late summer. She liked the spaciousness, the abundance, the slovenly, easy-going, inconsequent well-being of the place. It was a sort of Bohemia. Order or anything like routine were unknown. The common events of life never repeated themselves from day to day, as in other houses. Every meal was a surprise, either in the matter or manner of it. Every noteworthy occurrence, whether in the way of work or play, was a precedent. Sometimes a big gong would sound at eight o'clock in the morning, and all the household, like a troop of rabbits scuttling to feed, would rush into the breakfast-room to hear Dr Norman read prayers. One Sunday he would carry the children to church, on another to chapel, on a third to the Quakers' meeting-house. Once or twice a host of plasterers and masons had appeared at Shelley House. "Papa says I may have the place done up, if I choose to see to it," Regy had said, explanatorily ; but he had not seen to it, and the plasterers and masons appeared no more. One day the children woke up, determined to be industrious, and from morning till night Regy and Clevy shut themselves up in their carpenter's shop, and the girls sat sewing over a basket of clothes for the poor. Another day Regy chose to dig a canal in the kitchen-garden, and a pretty mess he made of it. No place was sacred except Dr Norman's study, and the

corridor leading to it, which was closed by a baize door. Not even Prissy presumed to open that door without leave.

"Was it always so?" Kitty once asked of old Symonds the housekeeper; "in Mrs Norman's time, I mean?"

The old woman lifted up her hands deprecatingly.

"My dear Miss, Mrs Norman was just like the children, as full of spirits as an egg is full of meat; and, like them, handsome too, but she hadn't as much order in her whole body as you have in your little finger. The house looked better then, because she kept more servants, and the furniture was new; but, Lord bless your heart! neither she nor master cared to see anything spick and span. Not they. Mistress was very fond of music, and master was always wrapped up in his books, as he is now, only that mistress was a good deal with him. The house might go, and the house did go, and it's done nothing but go ever since. I should like to rise from my grave and see the place in apple-pie order when Master Regy comes to it. Not that I wish anything to happen to master; I'm sure I feel like a mother to him; only you know, Miss, one don't expect to use brushes and brooms in heaven, and it's a shame, as I think, not to be tidy whilst here below; but there's no making master of women's way of thinking, none whatsoever."

Kitty saw no necessity for making Dr Norman tidy, though she had feigned a little tidiness herself, by way of pleasing the maids; she therefore tried to introduce no new element into the household, rather fostering the old, only taking great care that the disorder should be bright and pleasant and comfortable. She coaxed Symonds into dismissing one or two inefficient servants, and hiring more capable ones. She coaxed the gardener into putting the garden into order. She coaxed everybody into the persuasion that she herself was the fittest person to order the dinner. As time wore on, and Dr Norman's return might be expected in a week or two, Kitty reviewed her campaign triumphantly. The children were all supplied with new-fashioned, well-made clothes; the cook scavenged the poultry-yard and the vegetable-garden, and sent up

savoury dishes ; new flowers were planted round the house ; the broken furniture was mended ; a little more plate was got out. In fine, without having brought about a revolution, Kitty had wholly changed the face of things. One could see now that a lady reigned in the house. She did not forget her old friends in these busy days. She thought of them as she wandered through the wilderness of orchard, viney, and kitchen-garden, as she helped Prissy to feed the chickens and ducks, as she went with Regy into the well-stocked cellar, saying to herself, "If they could only have the crumbs that fall from the children's table !"

It was a land of Goshen, this old-fashioned homestead, and she had come from the veritable Bohemia, where the fruit is always plucked before it ripens, and the fountains are running over to-day and dry to-morrow. One afternoon, she sat quite alone in the drawing-room, thinking of these things with a smile upon her lips. How she wished the whole merry disorderly troop could drop down from the clouds for a little while—Polly Cornford, Perry, Papa Peter, and all. There is no envy in Bohemia, and she knew they would enjoy vicariously the sight of the good things with which she was surrounded. She could write and tell them about everything in glowing colours enough, but only personal experience could make them understand what a home Shelley House had become to her. Dr Norman's wife could hardly have been a more absolute mistress in his house than she was now ; and though she had not a spicce of authoritativeness in her composition, she liked to have her opinion considered of more weight than other people's. If you wish to be popular, you must not have too many opinions, and Kitty took care that hers were always inoffensive ones. Who can blame her that she hungered and thirsted after the favour of the rich, seeing that she was so poor and so alone in the world ?

Kitty leaned back in her easy chair, a novel on her lap, scents of flowers and ripe hops blowing across her face, not a care for to-morrow disturbing her contented mood. She had somewhat neglected Perry of late, a thought that might have

pricked a little ; but he was so forgiving, he would be cold for a moment, and then fond for a year. She knew Perry very well.

How good it was to be here ! How good it was ! There were two bay-windows in this drawing-room, and Kitty did not see, as she sat and dreamed, that some one was walking across the lawn towards her. A low vagabondish "Whew !" caused her to jump from her seat and turn round.

"O Perry !" she cried, in a voice of dismay. He stalked across the room, the same Perry as ever, his long fair hair blown about wildly, his clothes large, but very loose and indefinite, like his moral notions, and saturated with the smoky, painty atmosphere of Paradise Place. He would fain have kissed Kitty after lover-like fashion, but she drew back.

"O Perry !" she repeated.

But in a moment it flashed upon her that, as Dr Norman was from home, Perry's visit could do no particular harm ; and, being a Bohemian at heart still, it made her happy that some one had come for whom she could kill the fatted calf. So her manner changed, and she shook his hand warmly, and asked after Polly, and Papa Peter, and the children ; laughing quite gaily and naturally.

" You shouldn't have come," she said ; " but as only the children are at home, it doesn't much matter ; and it is pleasant to see you again, Perry."

" I want you to go back with me, Kitty."

" What else do you want ?" Kitty asked ; and, fetching a brush from the hall, she set to work to brush his clothes, turning him to right and left, as if he had been a child.

" Would you mind losing an inch or two of hair ?" she asked, insinuatingly ; and he said he didn't at all mind ; whereupon she took up her scissors, and click, click, off went Perry's long locks, like Samson's under the hand of Delilah. In the midst of this operation, she heard footsteps on the threshold. Quick as lightning, brush, scissors, and locks were thrust in her pocket ; and when Regy entered, the two stood talking about the weather, as any lady and gentleman might do.

"This gentleman is an old friend of mine from London," Kitty said, "who happened to be down this way, and called upon me. Mr Perugino Neeve—Mr Reginald Norman."

There was so much boyish *bonhomie* about Perry, that Regy felt at ease with him instantly.

"I'm so glad to see you," he said. "Won't you be able to stay to dinner?—or you have not had lunch, perhaps?"

Perry expressed himself quite willing to take lunch and stay to dinner.

"I'll order Mr Neeve's lunch up at once, Miss Silver," Regy added; "then we can get out for a drive before the children return from their walk."

Perry made his lunch last as long as he could, heartily wishing that the children would come back. He wanted to have Kitty all to himself, and he saw that Regy was no boy to be cheated out of her company surreptitiously. But Regy made haste to order the carriage, and poor Perry could but submit.

The carriage came to the door, a low basket-chaise with room for four persons only. Regy very politely gave his guest the seat of honour, so that Perry had at least the satisfaction of sitting by Kitty's side; and as Regy had to drive, sitting sideways, his face was turned away from them a good deal. When opportunity offered, Perry whispered under Kitty's parasol—

"Kitty, you must come back; it is so miserable without you!" And when the pony was lazy, and Regy had to turn round and urge him on pretty severely, Perry ventured on a longer and more tender speech, *sotto voce*, such as, "I shall not go back without knowing when we may expect you, Kitty; upon my word, I shall not!"

Kitty took refuge in frank, outspoken interest in Paradise Place.

"Mr Norman will excuse us for talking a little of old friends, won't you?" she said to Regy, with a pleasant smile; and of course Regy was delighted that they should talk of old friends. Perry, in no very good spirits or temper, began thus:

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"Well, Kitty, the pot-boilers are not thriving, I can promise you."

"Pot-boilers?" asked Regy, inquiringly.

"Mr Neeve is an artist, and uses artists' slang," Kitty said, laughing; "a pot-boiler means a picture that is painted just to make money by; in fact, that the pot may boil. Isn't it a strange way of talking? And why doesn't the pot-boiler thrive, Perry?" Seeing Regy look more astonished still, she added, "Mr Neeve and I played together as children, and are such very old friends that we always call ourselves by our Christian names."

"Nothing goes on as it should do," said Perry; and, Regy turning his head just then, he added, "as if you didn't know why."

The drive did not go on as it should have done either, for something was amiss with the harness, and Regy had to alight once or twice to adjust it. Perry, who grew more impatient and rash every moment, heartily wished that the trap would collapse altogether. It did, indeed, threaten to do so, for the pony was a perverse pony, and shied constantly; but still no excuse offered for getting out to walk. The country around was lovely. They had climbed through a succession of shady lanes to the brow of a hill, from which they looked down on a sea of golden corn. The effulgence of ripened wheat and barley, the bright blue sky, the purple bluffs rising in the distance, made a sight to gladden an artist's heart; and then they passed wholly out of the warm mellow region of the uplands, and entered dusky aisles of oak and elm, where all was cool and solemn and quiet, save for the mingled notes of thousands of little birds. But Perry's heart was sore, and refused to be gladdened. Had he come here with Polly Cornford and Kitty, and one or two of the fellows, as he called his friends, his gaiety would have been like the gaiety of a child, almost foolish in its abandonment. He would have climbed the hazel-trees, and gathered nuts like a squirrel; he would have thrown himself at full length on the grass, and quoted Béranger and Heine; he would have dressed Kitty's head with

ivy leaves, and called her his Bacchante ; he would have sung to her how

“ Brown Adam rigged a bower in gude greenwood  
Above his ladye and him.”

But Perry could not sing or be frolicsome to-day. He did not care for the wood or the harvest-fields or the sweet-smelling hop-gardens. He wished himself thousands of miles away. Kitty's unreserved manner, and Regy's perfect ease with her, displeased and disconcerted him, and he was quite ready to manifest his ill-humour when occasion offered. When the drive came to an end, she sent Regy away on some plausible behest, and, taking Perry's arm, led him to a quiet summer-house.

“ Here we can have five minutes' talk,” she said, sitting down. “ In the first place, Perry, what made you come down here in such a temper ? You should have stayed at home till you felt a little more cheerful.”

“ Tell me one thing,” Perry said, very sharply, “ what have I to make me feel cheerful ? are you not more inclined to stay here than ever you were ? Have you not been talking to that boy of a hundred plans for your amusement ? I see plainly that you prefer the life here to that with us.”

“ You speak as if a few weeks were a lifetime. Am I to blame because I like a little innocent pleasure ? Men never seem to understand how dull women's lives are.”

“ It is not a question of a few weeks' pleasure,” Perry said, growing calm. “ God knows I like you to be gay, Kitty ; but I see, I know, I feel, that the longer you stay here, the less willing you will be to come back to us.”

And Perry's eyes grew big and heavy with tears, and his under-lip trembled.

Kitty could not bear to see him look miserable.

“ Perry,” she said, and her voice was soft,—“ Perry, I have never yet deceived you in anything : why do you judge me so harshly ? Wait a little, and I shall grow tired of being here, I am sure I shall ; if I am not tired, I will come back to you all the same.”

"But the better you like the place, the more unwise it is of you to stay. All this sort of thing is like taking opium."

"What sort of thing?"

"Pony-carriages, croquet-grounds, plenty of servants, and so on," Perry added, with an explanatory wave of the hand; "all this sort of thing is very well in its way, and so are mansions in Belgravia, powdered footmen, and court balls; but Fortune can't serve everybody alike, and Fortune hasn't served you or me to her creams and custards."

"Don't moralise, Perry."

"So long as we have a good appetite, what does it all matter?" Perry added. "Let those eat the creams and custards who have got 'em, but let you and I love each other, and we shall envy nobody's feast."

And as he said this, he took both her hands in his, and looked into her eyes beseechingly.

"Dear Perry," she said, and her face softened—"dear Perry;" but beyond this expression of affection, Perry could get nothing out of her.

He was by no means satisfied. How could he be satisfied? Had she not given him stones for bread? Was it not as clear to him as the first axiom of Euclid that she loved money? that it was as necessary to her existence as love, babies' babble, a man's protection to other women? The man who would win her must come as Jupiter did to Danaë, in a shower of gold; and it was only now and then, in a rare flush of ambition, that he felt he should ever be that man. In spite of these gloomy thoughts, he made merry with her and the children over the dinner. Regy was a very good host, and when the ladies retired, brought out some old port, and behaved in quite a manly fashion. What with the wine, and the merry talk, and the home-like informal atmosphere of the place, Perry's heart grew gradually lighter, and he did not leave Shelley House till a late hour.

"Come again," repeated Regy and Clevy many times; "Do come again," little Laura said, blushing.

Kitty said nothing, but her looks did not bid him come

again. Instead of an invitation, she slipped a fond little note into his hands, telling him only to have patience and all would go well.

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## CHAPTER VII.

*IN THE HOP-GARDEN.*

IT was now the perfect season of the year. The sky was of that soft hazy blue, seen only in autumn ; the air was heavy with woodland sweets, the beech-woods seemed tipped with fire. Throughout the length and breadth of the Weald of Kent —the beautiful Weald of Kent!—it was a Bacchanal from morning till night. For years the farmers had not seen so abundant a hop-harvest ; and as plenty naturally brings cheerfulness, and cheerfulness is infectious, every one went to work in the highest spirits. The Rhenish vintage is not a more poetic sight than a Kentish hop-garden in September. You see then what the real hardy English labourer is—red-skinned, fair-haired, broad-shouldered, and almost Herculean in strength; you see him make love, slyly winking his blue eye, and showing his white teeth ; or you see him play with his children—for the tiniest white-haired toddler comes into the hop-garden, as a matter of course—and then, what king so happy as he? Listen to the talk of two or three labouring folks for ten minutes, and compare it to the talk of ordinary ladies and gentlemen over tea and croquet. You will not find the former the most insipid ; on the contrary, perhaps, you will wish you could escape from the tea-table and croquet-lawn oftener. Hard-working people do not, as a rule, talk for the sake of talking, but their child-like, healthy, unphysicked understandings are brought to bear upon practical subjects, with a raciness and broad humour that amply compensate for more delicate qualities.

There was a good-sized farm attached to Shelley House, which Dr Norman pretended to farm, but which was in reality left much to itself. It seemed to thrive pretty well, and it

was the children's delight, of all others, to take part in whatever work might be going on. In these bright September days they were always in the hop-garden : Regy ordering in cider and ale like a master, Clevy helping to pull down the fragrant tendrils, Wattie playing or fighting with some little peasant lad, the girls working and reading in some shady nook close by. It was a happy time ; no one had any cares, no one wanted yesterday to return, or to-morrow to come ; the joy of living in such sunshine and breathing such sweet air seemed enough. Even Kitty, who had ambitions, felt lulled into a quiet mood by the influences around her. The smell of the hops so acted upon her nerves—she wrote to poor, perturbed, impatient Perry—that for the present, she always felt in a dreamy soporific state, and could not bring herself to decide upon, anything. For Perry was always urging upon her to return as soon as ever Dr Norman should be home again, and she would not promise this. She was quite sure in her own mind that Dr Norman would urge her to stay, and she determined upon staying. What excuse she might find, with what sophistry or logic she might prevail upon Perry to forego and forgive her absence, was a point she left utterly to chance. It was impossible to foretell how much chance might help her; and if not, there were other helps to rely upon.

Regy's holidays were drawing to a close, and this made Kitty alike glad and sorry. She had grown very fond of Regy, and the boy adored her, but she did not know what she should do with his adoration when Dr Norman was back again. It would be laughable for Dr Norman to find that, during his absence, Regy had taken to the pastime of falling in love. She wanted Dr Norman to find everything going on as smoothly as possible—no quarrels, no excitements, certainly no courtships.

A hop-garden is just the place to induce dreamy thought, and, dismissing every idea that could disturb her, Kitty liked to lie quite still on the grass, to close her eyes, and to imagine all sorts of pleasant things. "Let me go to sleep," she would say to the young ones, and having made her a pillow of hop-

leaves, they were sure to leave her quiet till she stirred ; often, as she lay thus, she really would sleep, and so long, that the children got tired of sitting still, and crept away to play, one by one.

One day, when she awoke from such a siesta, there was no one near her but Regy. He sat on the ground, and as she looked up, she encountered his bright brown eyes fixed upon her, with such an expression of seriousness in them that she thought something must be the matter.

"What is it ?" she asked.

"I did not say anything," the boy said, and blushed over the speech.

Half guessing what the look and blush meant, Kitty put her hand on his arm, and uttered his name in a tender, confiding way. She could not bear him to have an unhappy moment on her account.

"What is it ?" she repeated, and the tone of her voice conveyed some such consolation as this : Can I not, will I not make all right ? He took her words as she had intended them.

"You will laugh at me, or be angry with me ; I don't like to tell you," he said ; and he began plucking a rose to pieces that he had intended to give her with a pretty speech only five minutes ago. Kitty saw that he wished to tell her, in spite of the excuse, and it was part of her character to help people towards the fulfilment of their wishes. So she took the rose from his hands, playfully, and scolded him for destroying anything so pretty, and for distrusting her.

"When have I ever laughed at you, or been angry with you ?" she said ; and she said it with such gentleness that he felt inspired with courage, and spoke out like a man.

"I wish you would laugh at me, or be angry," he said ; "I wish I didn't care about you so much, because I am a boy, and I don't suppose that if I came to you in three years' time, and said—Kitty, I love you ! that you would do anything else but laugh then."

Kitty looked at him very seriously.

"Why should I laugh ?" she said. "Girls are always older

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for their years than boys, and I have had many things to make me feel old. But I am not so old, dear Regy, that what you say now, or might say three years hence, need make me laugh."

The boy went on, never daring to look at her.

"In three years' time I shall be a man, you know, and I mean to work hard at Oxford, and do all sorts of things to help me forward. It doesn't seem a long time to me; but what if I should come back and find you married?"

"That isn't at all likely."

"Are you quite sure—quite, quite sure?"

"How you catechise! I am quite sure that it isn't in the least likely."

"And if, at the end of three years' time, you were not married?"

"Well, what then?"

"Would you"—Regy hesitated and blushed again—"would you think of me?"

Kitty thought for a moment, and then answered him in a candid manner, as if the question under consideration were a most important, nay, a vitally important one, and worthy of all the deliberation she could bestow upon it.

"If I were to promise you that, Regy, I should be promising what I might not be able to fulfil, and that would be very unfair to you. One can never say what one will do in three years' time. You yourself may view things in quite another light then"—

"Never!" put in Regy, fervently.

"I do not say you will, dear Regy—I say you may; and I do not say that I should either—I only say that I might."

Regy's eyes seemed to fill with fire on a sudden.

"O Kitty!" he cried, too earnest to be ashamed now,—"O Kitty! is it possible that you care for me a little?"

"You foolish boy! as if I should have stayed here all these weeks without you. Have you not been my companion and friend? Have I not come to you in all my difficulties? But it would be unwise of us to go beyond that sort of friendship at present, Regy; in fact, it would be almost wrong."

"Wrong?"

"I think so; wrong on my part, I mean. It would be betraying the confidence your father places in me."

"But papa has no sort of authority over you, and he wouldn't dream of opposing me in anything."

"You didn't understand me, Regy," Kitty continued, still quite tender and earnest. "I was left, as it were, like an elder sister, to look after you, to make you all happy, and see that things went on well in the house. Dear Regy, what would Dr Norman say to find that during his absence you and I had been making love to each other? Only wait a little, till"—

"Till you are married!" cried Regy, with a touch of boyish petulance. "Isn't that what you mean, Kitty?"

"No, that is not at all what I mean. Who so unlikely to marry as I? I mean, dear Regy, and I should say the same to you if you were ten years older, that you, being Dr Norman's eldest son, have no right to talk of love to me in his absence, and I have equally no right to listen; only wait a little"—

"Till papa comes home?" asked Regy, opening his eyes very wide, indeed. "Do you mean to say that I ought to ask papa whether I may be engaged to you or not? Kitty, I couldn't."

"I meant to say," Kitty said, putting her hand on his arm with charming frankness, "that if you will repeat the same story to me three years hence, nay, two years hence, or, as you are so impatient, a year hence, I will listen to the end and not scold you."

Regy was not bold enough to kiss that soft hand, ecstatically as he admired it, but he picked up a curl of woodbine she had been playing with, and put it into his purse, declaring that he would keep it for ever.

Kitty saw no harm in this, and let him have his way. Prissy and Clevy had their playthings—why should not Regy have his? She only took care to extract a promise of good behaviour from him before the little scene came to an end, and rewarded him for it by all sorts of covert observances afterwards. She appealed to him for advice and assistance in little

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matters, with a sort of affectionate reliance that might have meant anything or nothing. And Regy was satisfied, on the whole ; he felt, though he would not own it, more grateful to her than if she had directly encouraged his suit. Kitty was only a few years older than himself, and how many men married women older than themselves ; but—but—Regy was quite convinced in his own mind that Dr Norman would see a great many “buts” to the matter. Dr Norman allowed his boys and girls almost entire liberty, on the principle that he wished each boy and each girl to have an individual character ; but he was always a little stern with them when they outraged common sense. Extravagance, petulance, obstinacy, and any fault of temper, he overlooked readily, whilst a really foolish act or pointless speech was sure to be lashed pretty sharply. Knowing this, Regy was content to wait till his beard should grow a little.

Dr Norman came home unexpectedly ; but Kitty had taken care that his room should be ready, and that his coming should not appear sudden. It was late one afternoon when he returned, and he thought, as he unlatched the front gate softly and looked towards the lawn, that never since his wife’s death had he come back in such a cheerful mood. How pretty and pleasant the old place looked in the light of the red autumnal sunset, all the windows bright as fire, the shrubberies cool and dusky, and happy young voices ringing through them !

He was on the point of shouting, “Prissy, Laura, Wattie, where are you ? ” when a merry laugh met his ear, and some one dashed through the laurels like a frightened fawn. It was Kitty. She wore a light summer dress, and as she had been playing hide-and-seek for the last half-hour, it was gathered up in her hands, so that one saw her beautifully shaped feet pretty plainly, and her little high-heeled slippers covered with scarlet embroidery. She had put on Clevy’s boating-hat, and what with her flushed cheeks, and her tumbled hair, looked younger and prettier than she really was ; for Kitty might fairly be called handsome, but not pretty as a rule. When she

saw Dr Norman, she stopped short and was almost ready to run away and never see his face any more for very mortification. Nothing could have happened more unfortunate for her. Dr Norman might have surprised her a hundred times, and never at so unseemly a time as now. Had he come at early morning he would have found her reading to Prissy, or mending Clevy's socks ; had he come in the afternoon, he would have found her busily packing Regy's portmanteau—for Regy was to leave the next day ; had he come only an hour before, he would have found her casting up the weekly accounts with Symonds. She wanted him, naturally, to see her in a dignified, reliable, mother-like light, and he had found her romping with the boys like any hoyden of fourteen ! but she collected herself, and made the best of her dilemma.

"We are so glad to see you back," she said ; "the poor children have grown quite impatient for you, and I have consoled them by joining in their games, as you see."

"It is very good of you," Dr Norman said ; and then Regy and the little ones came running to him one after the other, and he forgot all about Kitty for awhile.

The little ones were ready to tear him to pieces in their eagerness for the twentieth kiss or embrace, whilst Regy and Laura could hardly get in a word. Dr Norman expostulated, but in vain, and when he fairly got indoors, and was able to sit down, the kissing and embracing began again.

"O my dear, dear, sweet papa !" cried Prissy, hugging his hands ; "it was so miserable whilst you were away!"

"You don't appear as if you had been miserable, any one of you," Dr Norman said, looking at each by turns. "I never saw such a splendid look of health in my life as you all have, Symonds included. I think, Miss Silver, you must have been dieting my household on scientific principles : so much salts of potash, so much sugar, so much starch, per diem, eh ?"

"Miss Silver wouldn't let us eat cucumber, or hot pies for supper," put in Prissy, a little inclined to think that, now Dr Norman had come back, the nice suppers would come back too,

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"And quite right," Dr Norman said; "but have you all been kind to Miss Silver since I went away? Have you all waited on her and helped her?"

"They have been very kind, and they have all waited on me and helped me," Kitty said, simply; and for this speech, Miss Prissy, who was conscious of many a caprice and temporary fit of injustice towards Kitty, threw herself in her arms and kissed her. Kitty left Dr Norman and his children for a little while, in order to make the tea, to have his portmanteau unpacked, to do a hundred housewifely things; and whilst she was gone, you may be sure the young ones sounded her praises. In Prissy's eyes only, Kitty was not perfect. She praised her, she called her clever, and nice, and kind; but there was a certain something in the child's tone and look, that went far to undo her praise.

"Clevy says I don't like Kitty," she said, "but he knows nothing about it, papa. I'm very fond of Kitty; she dresses all my dolls, and I ought to be fond of her; but put down your ear, papa, for I have something to whisper in it—a great secret. Clevy, get away; Laura, stop your ears. Now, papa."

Dr Norman leaned down, and the child put her round little mouth close to his ear, and a dimpled hand on each side.

"*I think, papa, but I'm not sure, that Kitty told a story once!*"  
Prissy was naturally reproved.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### PERRY'S LETTER.

No one possessing an ordinary amount of character returns to his usual mode of life after several weeks' travel quite the same person he left it. Even minds of the most common quality are affected more or less by outward events, as dull stone gradually gets a rich colour without any principle of receptivity within; but a man or woman whose intellectual

and moral capacity is above the average, may be said to gain largeness and strength with the seasons, like trees. Dr Norman came back from Norway in a fresher and brighter state, mentally and physically. He had gone away looking like an overworked London student ; he had come home looking bronzed and sturdy as one of his labourers. Kitty did not see more of him than before, but he was infinitely more genial and pleasant when in her company. To men it is much easier to form new domestic relationships than to women ; and seeing this bright, willing, capable girl, placed, he hardly knew how, at the head of his household, he was content. But his contentment was not wholly the contentment of selfishness. He formally, for once and for all, consulted his children on the subject of Kitty's staying at Shelley House. For instance, he took Laura aside, and asked her such questions as these—

“Tell me frankly, Laura—are you happier here with Miss Silver than you were at school with all your friends ?”

“O papa, a great deal happier ! Kitty is so nice ; nobody could be nicer than she is.”

“But I fear your accomplishments are sadly running to seed. What is become of your music, French, and German, calisthenics, and use of the globes ?”

“I practise my pieces, papa, and Kitty reads instructive books to us—such as Miss Strickland’s ‘Lives of the Queens of England,’ and Johnson’s ‘Lives of the Poets !’”

“And do you ride on your pony every day, and go to bed at eight o’clock ?”

“How absurd, papa ! Eight o’clock ! But I do go at nine punctually, and ride Dickybird every day.”

Matters standing thus satisfactorily with Laura, Dr Norman catechised Prissy.

“Tell me, Prissy,” he said, “isn’t Prissy very, very fond of Miss Silver ? I want to know.”

The little girl thought and thought.

“Miss Silver makes everybody like her,” she said at last, “and Laura likes her—and, oh ! Regy, he does like her, and I

—I like her—but I like people best who don't want me to be fond of them. I like Grace Davenport better, though she declares that I am not her friend ; and I like Symonds better, though I know Symonds' pet is Wattie."

"But you ought to like Miss Silver better because she tries to make you love her, oughtn't you, Prissy ?"

"Why ought I, papa ? Why ought I to care for one person more than another ?"

"Oh, metaphysical Prissy !"

"Meta——, what, papa ? Why do you use such funny words ?"

"But about Miss Silver, Prissy. You wouldn't like her to go away, would you ?"

"She isn't going away, I know," said Miss Prissy, confidently.

"You can't know that."

"Yes, I can, papa."

"But why should you be so sure ?"

"Because I am ; that is why, papa."

"Go away !" cried Dr Norman, half impatient, half admiring. "You are a pretentious pussy, that is what you are, and a pretentious pussy who talks of much she doesn't understand."

In spite of being thus taken down, Prissy would come to Dr Norman and her sister again and again with little stories of Miss Silver. Miss Silver was always doing some wonderful thing or other in the child's eyes, and she could not understand how it was that no one else saw as much as she did.

One day—oh, monstrous!—she happened to go into Miss Silver's bedroom, and found a stocking with such a big hole in it lying on a chair ! "You may laugh if you please, Miss Laura, but I saw it ; I did see it !" Another day she pounced upon Miss Silver to give her a shower of kisses on account of some piece of benevolence or other,—“and what do you think Miss Silver was writing ? She was writing *Dear Perry, how can you be such a fool ?*—wasn't that very rude of her ?” On a third occasion, Miss Prissy happened to be passing by the open door of Regy's room : Kitty was busily packing Regy's things for Eton,—“And what do you think she let Regy do

when she was sitting on the portmanteau to press it down ? She let him put on her slipper that had fallen off ! ” Laura used to turn very red, and work herself up into a pretty little passion at hearing this ; and the sisters would be enemies for five minutes.

“ It is so mean, so unladylike, so babyish, to tittle-tattle as you do, Prissy,” she would say ; “ if you do that when you are older, people will hate you.”

“ I like to be hated sometimes,” Prissy replied, vindictively.

“ Oh ! very well, then ; I will let you make yourself as disagreeable as you like.”

Dr Norman came in during one of these little scenes, and, seeing the children both flushed with temper, and hearing “ Kitty, Kitty,” nothing but Kitty on their tongues, grew very severe.

“ You are the eldest, Laura ; and it is you on whom the responsibility of such conduct rests. If I see any more of this kind of thing, I shall tell Miss Silver she had better go, till you can both be more amiable.”

This threat sounded awful even in Prissy’s ears, for Kitty had managed to make herself necessary to her in many ways. Prissy had never had such dolls’ toilettes before the arrival of Miss Silver—never such dolls’ cushions, carpets, and cradle furniture—never such doll’s parties. So Prissy exercised a little self-control for the next few days, and Dr Norman heard no more scolding and crying.

Meantime Regy went away, and Kitty felt as if a great burden had slipped off her shoulders. She liked the lad, and appreciated his admiration for herself, but his budding sentimentality bored her. She had begun to find that it was not an easy matter to be everybody’s heroine ; she had too many threads in her hand, and was always on the point of making a false stitch, and letting one of the threads go wrong altogether. Regy gone, there remained one person less to please systematically all day long, and consequently the day’s work became less onerous.

The perfection of art is to conceal art, and Miss Silver, who

had lived among artists, and learned, parrot-wise, a good many artistic dogmas, now began to apply them. She was careful to subdue her bright colours, so as not to hurt cultivated eyes ; and she took good care to have her gaiety subdued, and her sadness never too solemn.

For instance, when Dr Norman once found her on the point of crying, she dashed an impatient hand across her bright eyes, and said—

“How absurd I am, Dr Norman, to trouble myself about my future, when every one is so good, and everything pleasant here, and you wish me to stay.”

“Of course I wish you to stay,” Dr Norman said, with some concern ; “and I think I understood from Laura that you liked it.”

“Above everything,” Kitty said, eagerly. “I have few friends—none who are rich enough to offer me such a home as this—and if you found me half-crying just now, it was because I was thinking of all the kindness I cannot repay.”

Dr Norman, seeing that her eyes were full, gave her a hearty shake of the hand, and hurried away.

Kitty had not confessed the real cause of her tears ; which was a letter lying snugly in her pocket. It had come that day from Paradise Place, and ran as follows :—

“DEAR KITTY,

“I would run down to see you, only I know how provoked you would be. O Kitty ! it isn’t your staying away that will ever make me a steady fellow. I just get into a devil-me-care sort of way, and my money is spent three times over before it is half-earned. I shall never get money or credit whilst you stay away, Kitty, never ; and I am losing my chances of ever getting a name, and holding my own against the dealers. That picture of mine, the Corot sort of thing with big trees full of yellow sunset—you remember it, I daresay—is finished now, and not worth a five-pound note. I got desponding and bilious over it, and daubed it with yellow till it is half-like a London fog, and half-like a sandpit

after heavy rains. If you were to come back I might perhaps alter it a little, but it will never be worth much. I went out with Crosbie Carrington the other night. They stood me a supper at Evans', and I believe I drank too much. O Kitty, Kitty! you will bring worse things on me than this if you stay away longer, and get half-an-inch farther off us every day.

“PERRY.”

Whilst Kitty was reading this letter, she saw a vision of Perry writing it. She could see him sitting at his three-legged writing-table in his shirt sleeves, his fair hair pulled desperately over his brows, his toilette utterly reckless, his beard untrimmed, the atmosphere surrounding him dingy, dusty, painty. He would be sure to look very pale, having kept late hours; and she thought she could see him biting his nails between each sentence, and trying to be more sorry than indignant, and more pitiful than tender. Perry was as dear to Kitty as a kitten is dear to a child; and thinking of him in this mood she shed a few tears.

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## CHAPTER IX.

MRS CORNFORD was ready to cry herself at seeing her adopted son Perry in such a state of despondency. She did her utmost to console him for Kitty's lengthened absence, and, what was better still, to cure him of his passion. But both tasks seemed as helpless as that of Sisyphus; and Perry, who was as unstable as water when he had a fair chance of success, was dogged to any degree when his chances were those of little boys fishing for big fish with bent pins. He could have painted marvellous pictures with only a very little more study and care; he could have won fortune, friends, plenty of good things, had he chosen; but he chose to prefer Kitty to all, just because Kitty alone was inaccessible. It was the old story. What

little lad of six does not prefer his papa's riding-whip to any of his own toys, for the simple reason he must not play with it? Perry knew well enough what little hold he had upon Kitty's affections. She called herself a friendless girl, and used formerly to comfort him by saying that she had no one but him to care about her. But he knew well enough that no one was less friendless than she. She lived, indeed, upon an income of friendliness. She drew constant cheques upon that bank, and not one had been dishonoured yet. She had neither kith nor kin, it is true, but she had adopted brothers, uncles, sisters, aunts, and all the men he knew adored her. Who could help adoring her—if not for her wit, for her beauty ; if not for her beauty, for her sprightliness ; if not for her sprightliness, for her fine carriage ? Moreover, Perry appreciated character, though he had so little himself, and seeing how Kitty could conquer and rule people, winding their wills like silk round her fingers, and how, being conquered and ruled, people adored her, he was ready to let his adoration go any length. If she threw him off, after having plighted her troth to him, he would have his revenge—to that his mind was fully made up.

Perry's studio seemed to take colour and shape from his dreary mood. The carved oak cabinet grew blackish and funereal looking, the dingy statuettes threw up their arms or veiled their faces in despair, the lay figure grew more and more dishevelled and tragic, the palette showed nothing but dismal greys and browns, the picture on the easel was a mere bit of passionate sky blurred with big drops of rain like tears. There was a bunch of dead flowers in a broken vase, an empty bird-cage hanging in the window, a broken guitar resting against the mantelpiece, a faded pink neck-ribbon—precious relic of some holiday with Kitty—was fastened to the cracked mirror. Nothing could have looked more wilfully despondent than Perry's studio at this epoch. Perry himself caught the woe-begone aspect of things. He had ever been pale, but he was now flushed at times, and the flush had an unhealthy look about it ; or he was ashy white, with dark circles under his

eyes. He grew thinner than ever : and no wonder, for he ate less and less, and went to bed in the small hours after supping unwholesomely, often off beer only. He smoked unmitigatedly ; that is to say, he smoked when he was hungry or when he was thirsty, when he had eaten and when he had drunk, when he was warm and when he was cold, when he was busy or when he was idle. Mrs Cornford took him to task severely for such reckless behaviour.

"Before I tried to waste myself to a skeleton," she said, "I would first see if there was no possibility of adding a stone of flesh to the little I possessed already. Finish that picture, take it to Blakesley, and go to Switzerland for a month with the money. If you don't, you'll catch cold the first foggy day that comes, and die before the winter is out."

"What matter if I do ?" cried Perry, impatiently.

"But you shan't die, Perry, I can't allow it ; I've other ideas about you. Now do set to work and earn lots of money ; Kitty would marry you then."

"No, she wouldn't. She will marry that rich widower down there, and throw me over altogether."

"If she does that, she's a heartless, worldly woman, and I'll never lend her another sixpence."

"Don't abuse Kitty to me," Perry went on, painting away as he spoke ; "it isn't because she is heartless or worldly that she does this thing or that thing ; it is because she's inclined to do it, and she can't help doing it. I do what I'm inclined to do ; so do you ; and it isn't our fault that we do what other people scold us for doing."

"Perry, you talk like a fool."

"And fools always speak the truth."

"But then there is no particular advantage in being a fool that I can see," Mrs Cornford said, coolly. "You are doing the very thing to make Kitty marry the widower ; Kitty likes the good things of this world, and has set her face against marrying a poor man. You were always as poor as a church-mouse, but now you are making yourself as thin as the paper the church-mouse feeds on. Will Kitty like you better for

being a tatterdemalion? Not she. She would marry you to-morrow, and you would live happy ever after, if you had a few thousand pounds of your own."

"I know that well enough."

"Don't sigh and look suicidal. Set about earning a little money like a man. Look at me: I'm one of the fair sex, as fools say—that is, I'm a woman. Haven't I worked like a man for nearly twenty years, supporting a sick husband, and a dozen helpless things I was fond of? I have ideas and an eye for colour, but no genius; and whilst I drudge away for days, copying models, and draperies, and furniture, you dash in a few colours, and turn out a picture that nobody else could have painted but yourself. If I were half as clever as you, I should not only be able to give my poor chicks bread and clothes, but should be able to make ladies of them."

"You are like all women," Perry said; "not having learned algebra, they are always meddling with unknown quantities. Of course you would do as you say if you were me, but then I am myself, and I do what it is my nature to do."

"Then you will lose Kitty Silver."

Perry's sallow cheeks flushed, and he spoke very eagerly—"Polly, don't speak as if it were my fault. If she returned quite the Kitty of other days, I could paint in a way that would astonish you; I know I could, and I should do it; but I cannot try to do anything without a spur in my side."

"I should think you had a spur in your side—and a pretty sharp one too," Mrs Cornford said, smiling.

"Do you think, then, that Kitty cares for me, and that she will come back to us?"

Mrs Cornford went to Perry's tobacco-box, put as much tobacco as would lie on her finger-nail into a bit of gauze paper, and, fixing her eyes on the wall, smoked and thought deliberately. When her modicum of tobacco had come to an end, she said—

"My opinion about Kitty is just this, Perry: you could win her, if you only set about doing it in the right way. You know love isn't lord of all, and a clever woman like Kitty sees

more when she looks through a brick wall than most people do. A lazy bird is contented to catch one fly, but Kitty dives after all she sees ; though you are a silly little fly, ready to jump down her throat, there are so many big ones she wants besides."

"Only tell me what to do, and I'll do it," Perry said, with a desperate inclination to lean upon somebody.

"Firstly," Mrs Cornford said, "you must have your hair cut, buy a new suit of clothes, and wash your hands. Secondly, you must call upon Kitty, not looking at all as if you were uneasy, you know, but more as if you had found another Kitty elsewhere. Thirdly, you must get one of your friends to invite you to stay at some country-house ; and when installed there, write to Kitty how you are enjoying yourself, *et cetera, et cetera.*"

Perry groaned.

"If Kitty were only contented with me as I am," he said.

"Then you wouldn't care a straw about her. It is just the woman who is discontented with a man, the man always wants to marry. If you would only fix your affections upon a dear little stupid creature, you would not have far to go. But my moddle is waiting all this time, and I really cannot talk longer. After all, you'll take your own advice ; you can't make a donkey think that anything is better than his thistle."

Mrs Cornford and her "moddles," as she chose to call them, might alone furnish materials for a long story. Some one has written, that in painting you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature, but Mrs Cornford's painting was not of this peaceful and pleasurable kind. She had to contend with all sorts of intractable human tempers, from the beginning of a picture to the end : this model was irritable ; that was troubled about a sick sister ; one never kept appointments ; another, who was a handsome creature, invariably looked ugly when you wanted her to be charming.

Then there were such minor difficulties as these : you want a lovely young creature with golden hair to personate Eve or Venus, but neither in Seven Dials nor in Belgravia are Eves and Venuses as thick as blackberries, and you have to content

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yourself with hiring the amount of beauty you want by instalments—getting golden hair here, a pretty complexion there ; a fine contour from a third, a beautiful throat and arm from a fourth, and so on. The process is tedious, but the result satisfactory. Mrs Cornford turned out beautiful things after this fashion, and lost temper less than most people would have done over her models. She rated them soundly for derelictions of duty, though in such a way that none ever took it amiss ; and after extraordinary good behaviour, she rewarded them by cosy cups of tea, or little glasses of liqueur, a proceeding that set her on the pinnacle of favour.

Out of Mrs Cornford's dingy studio emerged such bright, sweet bits of colour, that they reminded one of beautiful butterflies cradled in dusky cocoons. Fashionable ladies who saw them on the Academy walls, would never guess the history of those apparently fresh creations. "Oh, what a pretty ear!" "What lovely blue eyes!" "What sweet, babyish dimples!" such fair spectators would say, whilst looking at poor Polly Cornford's laboriously achieved pictures, never dreaming what these pretty ears, and blue eyes, and babyish dimples, had cost the artist. But Mrs Cornford made light of all difficulties, fortunately for herself, estimating her own capabilities at their worth. She knew that, much as she had done, she could do far more ; that in her especial field she had hardly a rival ; that by dint of study and training she might, by and by, be judged by the standard applied to men. She knew all this, and worked early and late with a steady purpose one would hardly have expected of her, judging from outward appearances. Her slow movements, portly person, and short, round hands, certainly indicated a phlegmatic temperament ; and she was phlegmatic, except where her pictures and her charities were concerned. She was a sort of providence in her way ; and seemed to look upon her earnings as the property of her invalid sister-in-law, her adopted aunts, and her three orphan nieces. Everybody belonging to her was made smart and comfortable with her money. She held herself responsible for the general enjoyment of cakes and ale, never feeling slighted

if she got the smallest share. When Kitty had sometimes urged upon her the necessity of buying a new bonnet, she would invariably say, "Oh ! I must first think of my chicks !" and though they were not pretty, poetic children, and sometimes vexed her with fits of ingratitude and insubordination, she went on indulging them and loving them all the same.

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## CHAPTER X.

WHAT is there in the whole universe like a Sunday in the country—so aristocratic, so peaceful, so good ? Then, if ever, the wheels of the earth seem resting, and it is possible to fancy an existence without change. The rector and his daughters walk under the arching elms, receiving all the homage of the villagers in their Sunday clothes ; the deaf old clerk stands outside the porch gossiping with his neighbours as they pass ; idle little boys sit till the last moment under the shade, showing each other marbles and pocket-knives ; the bells are ringing in the old sleepy strain ; the surrounding landscape is flecked with passing clouds ; the wild honeysuckle scents the air ; the graves are bright with daisies and buttercups.

On the Sunday following Perry's conversation with Mrs Cornford, he went down into Kent without breathing a word of his intentions to anybody. He was consumed with a desire to see Kitty, and to know his fate, as if fate and Kitty were such simple things that they could be read in a day—nay, an hour ! He had no intention of presenting himself at Shelley House, nor even of speaking with Kitty. He said to himself that by seeing her he should be able to know how his chances stood, and that was all he needed.

It was one of those perfect autumn days when all the heavens are purple, and all the earth is golden, and the air is balmier than in June. Perry, who was largely gifted with that exquisite sense of beauty, the artist's second nature, was not so

absorbed in his own thoughts as to be blind to these perfections. When he had gone down to Kent a few weeks ago, he was in a childishly irritable mood, that had taken off the edge of his enjoyment; but that mood had passed, leaving a habitual gloom. He felt more than ever at one with Nature now that he was uniformly unhappy, and more than ever conscious of outward beauty, finding his own life so barren of it. He was one of those men of real genius, but weak character, who make a goddess of the woman they love.

To Perry, Kitty was indeed a goddess. He considered no woman half so bright, so beautiful, so charming. He matched her with any man he knew for powers of repartee. She made clever puns, she mimicked, she could do anything and everything.

They had spent many a holiday together when she had smiled upon him, and he had never doubted for the future. What days were those! Those cheap little trips to Kew, to Greenwich, to Hampstead Heath, could never be excelled, he thought, by the fêtes of emperors or sultans. They had been so young, so free from care, so gay, so contented with one another! What did it matter if they had to walk a good deal, and eat penny ices, and pennyworths of cherries, whilst the Upper Ten Thousand dashed past them clad in silk and velvet, and bound to splendid banquets? Kitty had not coveted grandeur, had not even coveted comforts then. She was ready to enjoy anything that came in her way, and accepted his penny bunch of flowers as if it had been a set of diamonds. What could have altered her so much? It was not very long ago. Perry forgot that women grow old twice as fast as men, and that months had passed since he and Kitty had seriously talked of courtship.

He alighted at the little station, and walked through the quiet lanes, noting the soft greys and purples of the distant hills, and the wonderful glow of the red and yellow woods. He had to traverse one of these woods, and the delicious golden light in which he moved filled him with rapture. Then he came to a broad cart-way that was cut through the trees,

and looking across the star-shaped ferns, and the silver-stemmed birch, and the bright young pine, he could see a far-off glimpse of the sea. Marking all these things with an artist's eye, he walked briskly towards Shelley House, pausing only when he reached the garden palings.

It was now ten o'clock, and stationing himself where he was pretty sure not to be observed, he waited impatiently. He could hear voices on the lawn.

"Prissy, come in, and be dressed for church! Wattie, have you got my prayer-book?—Miss Silver is ready; come, all of you," and so on, till the gate opened.

Perry's heart gave a great leap when he saw Kitty, or what seemed more a semblance of Kitty than Kitty's self, emerge from the garden. He had often seen her look as bright, as handsome, as bewitching, but he had never seen her look at all as she did now. She wore very quiet colours, his once colour-loving Kitty, and moved along circumspectly, as if she were practising the demeanour of a nun or of a Quakeress. When she spoke to the children, her sentences were carefully expressed, and her words as carefully accentuated. Perry felt that he should have lacked courage to address this calm, cold, dignified lady, in his shabby, not to say vagabondish, attire, even had his mind been made up to do so. But he had set out with a resolution to do nothing for which Kitty should have cause to reproach him; in nowise to spoil her Sunday; not to hurt her position at Shelley House by even a hair's-breadth. The little party had proceeded about a hundred yards when the gate was thrown open violently, and Dr Norman came out. Perry drew back a little, and leaped a fence; then he walked on quickly, till he was quite near the whole party, this hedge shielding him from view. Dr Norman looked quite as much of a Bohemian as Perry, only there was this difference between the two—you saw at a glance that Dr Norman was an outward Bohemian only because he liked it, and not because necessity compelled. His crumpled coat was of the finest black cloth; his unbuttoned gloves were of the costliest kid; his hat ill-used, but unexceptionable.

Perry scanned him narrowly, and uttered an ejaculation of contempt : " To think that Kitty should care for the society of a man at least twenty years older than herself, and the father of all those children ! " Not that he could find it in his mind to despise Dr Norman utterly. No man is ever so ungenerous to a rival as a woman, and Perry felt obliged to confess that Dr Norman looked made of very good stuff.

What made him spiteful was the fact of his age. Kitty was too young, too handsome, too witty, to throw herself away upon a widower between forty and fifty. True, that the idea of a marriage between Kitty and her host was purely the conception of Perry's own brain ; but it seemed to him the only natural solution of her strange conduct. She was not so fond of children, not so fond of humdrum domestic life, as to give up her old love of liberty without some important ultimate end. A wealthy marriage, he thought, would seem such in her eyes, and reasoning from a man's point of view, he blamed Kitty, or any woman, for setting a wealthy marriage above love and freedom. It is an accepted theory that women live in their affections much more than men ; but are not men as ready to sacrifice everything to a passion, and readier also to exaggerate the expediency of such sacrifice ?

Whilst Kitty reasoned thus : Of what use for Perry to marry me when poverty will make us so wretched that we shall have no pleasure in each other or in our lives ? — Perry reasoned after quite another fashion. What was money—what was comfort—what was anything in comparison to a happy marriage ?

He crept along the hedge, and listened eagerly to the conversation going on outside. Kitty had turned round to greet Dr Norman, saying, with a smile—

" O Dr Norman, how late we shall all be ! and you promised faithfully to be early for once ! "

" Miss Silver, we must hasten up-hill a little, that is all. Shall I give you an arm ? — and you, Laura ? "

Kitty took one arm, Laura the other, and they walked on briskly.

"How does Wattie look in his new attire?" she asked of Dr Norman; "if it had not been for nurse I should have promoted him to knickerbockers long ago."

"Miss Silver has made me—oh! such big pockets, papa!" Master Wattie cried, joyfully, "and you would never guess what I've got in 'em." And then he thrust both hands in the beloved pockets, and danced before his father.

"I think, Wattie, Miss Silver is very kind to get you such nice things to wear," Dr Norman said; "and Laura, too, is promoted to bonnets, I see!"

"That reminds me," said Kitty, "that you have not yet said whether you wish me to accept the invitation to Mrs Wingfield's croquet party; Laura is naturally anxious to go."

"I don't like Mrs Wingfield."

"Then we will give up our party, won't we, Laura?" Kitty said, with a shade of regret in her voice.

"But my dislike to Mrs Wingfield is not so strong that I should wish to keep you away," Dr Norman put in, apologetically. "I don't want Laura to grow intimate with her, that is all."

"There need be no intimacy that I see. It is sure to be a crowded party, and Laura will have plenty of her own friends to associate with."

Then they talked of other things, Kitty being appealed to, Kitty giving her opinion, Kitty throwing herself heart and soul into the family interests, however minute. Perry grew sick with dismay at finding how utterly she could show a demure enthusiasm about people she had not known a few months back. He was half in the mind to hate her for her chameleon-like power of adaptation, to return to Fulham, and see her face no more. But the habit of a constant and tender nature was too strong. He went on.

By and by they came to a beautiful old church, built on a hill, and Perry forgot all his troubles for a moment or two, intoxicated by the colour of the soft grey walls, the dainty blue sky, and the gorgeous yellow woods below. When his impulse of admiration was over, he saw that Kitty was shaking

hands and talking about the weather with the rector and his family : then the two parties poured promiscuously into church, Kitty being treated with great respect by everybody, the old sexton pulling his forelock to her, the school-children dropping a curtsey, the shopkeepers' wives bowing deferentially.

The bell chimed a little longer, as if giving grace to a lame old man toiling up the hill ; then ceased, and everybody was listening to the rector's voice but Perry. He emerged from his hiding-place now, and after sitting on a grave-stone for half an hour in sullen contemplation, took out his sketch-book and portable paint-box, and consoled himself by working a little master-piece of colour. Then he began to feel childishly hungry, and descending to the village, feasted on bread and cheese and ale in a snug little wayside inn. Sitting in the clean-sanded parlour, he took out a leaf from his sketch-book, and wrote in pencil—

“KITTY,—I have been near you to-day, when you little knew it. A hundred and one things tell me that you are gradually forgetting me and the life you did not always despise. I shall never be famous or rich, I daresay, so I have no right to blame you for choosing as you have done. But I am afraid I shall always love you.

“P. N.

“P.S.—Be happy ; never mind me.”

Kitty received that letter as she was tying on Prissy's pin-afore for lunch. A little lad came running across the lawn with it, and Dr Norman, who was at the window, handed it to her. Poor Kitty could not help colouring a little, especially as Dr Norman, she thought, looked curious. She said something about an old friend passing through the village, and not liking to call because it was Sunday. Immediately Miss Prissy chose to open her round eyes and ask—

“Was it Mr Neeve, who played with us so nicely ?”

Kitty was very angry : that visit of Perry's had brought so many embarrassments with it, and now he must write ! She

dared not speak a lie before Dr Norman, but said "Yes," looking frankly at him as she spoke. He checked Prissy's inquisitiveness in a way that made Kitty part pleased, part puzzled. Did he guess her secret? Did he feel angry with her for having a secret? She could not tell.

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## C H A P T E R X I.

*KITTY'S DREAMS.*

PERRY'S letter disturbed Kitty's peace for many days. She wrote off to him the very afternoon she received it, and reproached him for his want of faith in her. When she had been sufficiently caustic on this head, she took a soft, womanly, cajoling tone, called him her dear, dearest Perry, her best friend in the world, her consolation through all the troubles of the day; and when she had, as she thought, given expression to the true state of her heart, she let her brains have full play, and reasoned with him as she had done of old. Why was he, why were all men so hard upon women, expecting fine feelings and unlimited sacrifices instead of a deliberate line of conduct —reasoned out as men reasoned out their own conduct where important affairs were concerned? Why was it looked upon as selfish and heartless of a woman to be politic, when a man was considered a fool if he were not? You will say, she said, that it is merely a question of affection between you and me, but it is more than that. I care for you more than for anybody in the whole world, and shall marry you, or not at all. It is not worth while to say more about the matter. Meantime, am I wrong in doing all that I can to improve my position? If I marry you, it is better that your wife should bring a respectable connection, though she can bring you no money. If I never marry you, who will find me home and shelter, and all that a woman wants? Dear Perry, is there nothing I can say that will convince you it is more wise than worldly of me to reason and act thus, and more foolish than unkind of you to

blame me for so doing? Kitty had profited by Laura's masters during the last few weeks, and could write a much more telling letter now. It is quite wonderful what brains will do for a woman. Kitty had picked up an education of some sort in Bohemia ; could play waltzes, strum the guitar, and dance to perfection, make bonnets like a milliner, knew a little smattering of French and German, and how to make the utmost of dull people. She improved upon these accomplishments now, practised on the old grand piano when Dr Norman was out and the children at play, worked at French grammar, and sang duets with Laura, hired a guitar, and throwing the pink ribbon across her shoulders, delighted the quiet people who came to tea with sparkling little tunes.

Kitty, you see, worked very hard ; and if she sometimes shut herself up in her room and cried from utter weariness, who can wonder? Nothing is a greater strain upon the nervous system than persistent self-denial, and Kitty denied herself from morning till night. She denied herself in little things and in great, for the sake of winning people's affections, and obtaining from them all the good things the Fates had denied her. Do you suppose there were not other occupations she preferred to that of dressing Prissy's dolls, or playing at everlasting cat's cradle with Wattie? Do you suppose she liked counting up laundress's bills, and seeing that Wattie did his sums, to the pleasant sound of a scratching slate-pencil and dry sponge wiping out wrong figures? Often and often she sighed for the delicious indolence of the old life, the sleepy Sunday afternoons, the little fêtes got up at a moment's notice, and so wonderfully sumptuous, at nobody's apparent expense ; the sherry-cobbler for which nobody ever seemed responsible, the free and easy intercourse, the utter exemption from grave thoughts or care—all these things Kitty dreamed of and sighed for in her solitude. But she had put her hand to the plough, and was determined not to look back. She considered life as a game of cards, and said to herself that she would make the best of her hand.

Once or twice Dr Norman noticed her pale looks kindly,

ordered up some of his old Madeira for her, watched her, absent as he was, to see whether she ate or drank, pressed her to let Laura drive her out every day, and, in other ways, took the same sort of care that her father might have done. Kitty would sometimes review all these little acts of consideration, one by one ; but she could never come to the conclusion that they were more than acts of consideration. She thought of her admirers in the old days ; their name was Legion, and hardly a day passed but from one or the other had come a flower, a box of bonbons, or a compliment. All that was over now, and, for compensation, she had the circumspect thanks of a grave widower for services rendered to his children. There was a little gaiety for poor Kitty, nevertheless. Mrs Wingfield, the neighbour of whom across the hedge Perry heard some talk, was continually giving parties, and inviting the whole Norman family. Dr Norman, it will be remembered, had expressed a dislike to this lady, and it needed Kitty's most skilful handling to carry her point, and at the same time to appear indifferent about it. The matter had unfortunately been brought up again before the answer was sent off.

"Do you really care much about going, Laura ?" Dr Norman asked ; whereupon Laura looked at Kitty, and, seeing her answer in Kitty's eyes, said, "Yes."

"And do you care about it, Miss Silver ?"

"If Laura likes it, of course," artfully answered Kitty ; and Dr Norman said no more.

The party was a superb one. Mrs Wingfield was the widow of a rich cotton-planter of Ceylon. She was one of those soft-looking, round-eyed, low-voiced things who pass off for having little or no character, whilst in reality they bend every will to their own ; and who equally pass off for having no passion, whilst Cleopatra was not more fiery in love or hate than they can be.

Mrs Wingfield wanted some one or something to be fiery about. She loved her dogs, and they adored her. But the affection of dogs is an equable thing, not nearly so subject to caprice nor so apt to run into excitement as friendship. She

had not loved her husband much, and she was not the sort of woman to make friends of men—only the nobler kind do that—and she did not care for the homage of fools. So she had lived very much alone hitherto, and, finding Kitty on the alert to be sympathetic, seized upon her as a jewel, determining to buy the jewel at any price. It was a case of elective affinity. The one had all sorts of gifts that the other wanted—wealth, and the captivating emanations of wealth, such as rich dress, servants, equipage, &c. The other had spirit, beauty (for a falser theory than that mere beauty makes a woman enemies among her own sex never was started), and every quality of character most valuable to society. So after a little preliminary friendliness, Mrs Wingfield said, imploringly, “Miss Silver, having dilly-dilly-dilly’d all the ducks to drink, how can I make them swim about and enjoy themselves ?”

“Have you croquet ?”

“Oh yes ! croquet, and bowls, and all that sort of thing; but the difficulty is to make a set of stupid people look as if they liked doing anything.”

“Shall I see what I can do ?”

“If you would.”

Kitty was off in a twinkling, and managed the set of stupid people beautifully. Soon the lawn resounded with the echo of croquet balls and animated voices, and everybody seemed amused. A trio of somewhat stiff old ladies Kitty was herself amusing. Mrs Wingfield looked on, in her supremely indolent way, and thought Kitty an angel. She could do nothing herself ; she loved people who did things for her.

Before the afternoon was over, a brisk little intimacy had sprung up between Mrs Wingfield and her visitor. Kitty was by far the most dignified about it, but jumped to friendly conclusions quite as fast.

“You will come up and see me often, won’t you ?” asked Mrs Wingfield, in quite an affectionate manner; and Kitty, of course, said “Yes.” It was a great comfort to her that Mrs Wingfield, being rich and of a certain accepted position, did not in the least disturb herself about her own. It sufficed for

Mrs Wingfield that Kitty was clever, and willing to use her cleverness on other people's behalf.

"Isn't it a little dull for you at Shelley House?" continued Mrs Wingfield, *sotto voce*; "Dr Norman is such a strange, unsociable sort of animal, I can't imagine how you can stay."

Kitty, knowing Mrs Wingfield to be rich and independent, thought it more expedient to be frank with her. She broke into a little self-pitying laugh, and replied, "A penniless lass with a long pedigree, dear Mrs Wingfield, is not overwhelmed with invitations to wealthy houses. Better be a guest of Dr Norman's than a governess elsewhere."

"Go out with me to India. I would marry you to ten thousand a year."

"Very well," said Kitty, affecting to treat the matter seriously. "When do you want me to be ready?"

"Perhaps in a week. I hate England the more I see of it, and one gets starved without good curry and chutney. Then, the servants here are so impertinent. Give me a dozen black boys, and I should be quite independent of all your fashionable cooks and ladies'-maids. Have you seen my black man, Tom-tom?—he's such a darling!"

Mrs Wingfield went on vaguely, Kitty putting in a polite "Yes" now and then; whilst her mind had shot as far ahead of the other's talk as a child's kite soars from the tiny hand holding it. If other things failed, why should she mind going to India? It was not for her to pick and choose her way in the world, she must just follow the first hand that beckoned. She took great care, therefore, to please Mrs Wingfield in small, almost infinitesimal ways; for Kitty was on principle a moral homœopath, dosing her patients sparsely and according to the fibre of constitution. Mrs Wingfield was not one of those persons who digest the coarser kinds of flattery; but there are other and subtler ways of worshipping people than by the lips. Kitty knew better than any one how to make a little action mean a good deal. She could fetch Mrs Wingfield's shawl unbidden, and put it round her shoulders in a way that made everybody feel that the hostess was a queen. She could

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admire Mrs Wingfield's jewellery or person a little way off, apparently quite unconscious that what she said was heard. Does any one blame Kitty Silver for these little artifices? Does any one despise her for them? Very likely; but remember that she was not born with a golden spoon in her mouth, and was born with a strong longing for golden spoons. It is very unfortunate to be born with such a longing. It tempts one to do many questionable things. But it requires more moral strength than Kitty possessed to keep from doing these things. She did not pride herself upon doing them; she went through the work of the day with a resolute spirit, and shut her senses to the disagreeable part of it. She had no support from without, no clanship to fall back upon, no wealthy uncles or aunts to make her their heiress. Was she wrong in building up her fortunes as she could, picking up a brick here, a bit of mortar there, never looking too closely to see if any mud were sticking to it? She did not always blame herself.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### *KITTY'S CHRISTMAS.*

THE first bright dry days of autumn came and went; then the cold white mists of November lay about the bare black woods, and the country was very dreary. Kitty used to take long walks with the children, shivering from head to foot, and ready to cry of discomfort. Winter to her had hitherto meant something cheerful, indolent, and luxurious. In Paradise Place, as soon as the first snows came, one large fire used to be kept up in the house, and everybody spent the chief part of the day near it. Neither Perry nor Mrs Cornford ever worked much in the shortest days; and after half an hour's zealous endurance of their freezing studios, they would come to the fire, and respectively cook, darn, sketch, and read French novels in company. The little girls squatted on the floor, and took a stray lesson in something or other—perspective, part-singing,

French, or elocution, as the case might be. Kitty had an arm-chair and an amusing book to read ; one or two of Perry's friends looked in for a chat, and the winter's day, which began for them between ten and eleven in the morning, ended tolerably early at night.

At Shelley House, the winter day seemed interminable. Dr Norman liked the children to be up early, and Kitty had to rise ere it was fairly light, and go through the long process of dressing, so as to be down by a little past eight o'clock. She had a fire in her bedroom ; but Shelley House was spacious and cold, and she often contrasted it regretfully with the warm dingy little home at Fulham. After breakfast came the daily governess and lessons, the long monotonous walk, then lunch, needlework, and the six o'clock dinner. Dinner was not so dull, because Dr Norman would be present, but he had grown less sociable during the last few weeks, and looked as if in trouble, Kitty thought. There was one milestone to break this dull road—namely, Mrs Wingfield's increasing friendliness. Mrs Wingfield tried hard to persuade Kitty to spend Christmas with her, and Kitty would have liked it, but the bare proposition brought a Round Robin of deprecations, to which she yielded at once. Kitty had dined occasionally with her new friend, and that she found delightful. The party consisted of two or three of Mrs Wingfield's Indian friends only ; there was no Laura present to keep down the amusing gossip of Indian life ; the meats and drinks were superb ; the men were pleasant and worldly ; and everything just as Kitty liked it. How she wished Perry had been there ! she could have flirted with him, and no one would have seen the harm. Mrs Wingfield and Kitty had grown intimate to such a point now, that they called each other Myra and Kitty. Myra had told Kitty her secrets, Kitty sitting at her feet all the while. On the occasion of the last little dinner, Myra had presented her with a very costly brooch, whispering, as she slipped it into her hand, "I will give you something much more beautiful, if you will go to Calcutta with me ;" and Kitty crimsoned pleasurabley, all sorts of visions floating before her mind.

She naturally showed the brooch to the children, and the story of it reached Dr Norman's ears. He listened more inquisitively than the occasion would seem to warrant ; even asked to see the brooch, turned it over in a speculative way, then returned it, saying—

“Mrs Wingfield is certainly very lavish in her gifts.”

Kitty kept her temper, but it provoked her that Dr Norman, who never gave her anything, should seem to grudge her acceptance of so valuable a gift.

“You don't like Mrs Wingfield, I know,” she said, “and that is why I did not show you her present at first.”

He looked as if bound to explain himself, but the children were present, and it was impossible for him to abuse Kitty's friends in their hearing. The first time he found her alone, he went back to the subject.

“I cannot honestly say that I know any harm of Mrs Wingfield,” he said, “nor have I had much opportunity of knowing her ; but the little I have seen, I do not like : she seems to me a person of thoroughly ill-regulated mind.”

Kitty smiled.

“Oh ! Dr Norman, I have an ill-regulated mind myself. Why should I want perfection in my friends ?”

“Is she really your friend ?”

“She is so kind to me, I can hardly feel as if she were not, though we see very little of each other. I have avoided going oftener, because you objected to it.”

“Thank you,” Dr Norman said. “Mrs Wingfield is not wise in her choice of friends, from all that I have heard ; though, as far as social position goes, they are everything one could desire ; but that is not all. A good moral and intellectual tone is much more important.”

“Mrs Wingfield and her friends are all reading people,” Kitty said.

“Oh ! what is that a sign of ? Reading to kill time is a mere vicious amusement.”

Kitty looked hurt, and Dr Norman hastened to qualify his speech.

"Of course I can only speak from a very partial experience, and I ask your pardon if I have been unfair to your friend. One is apt to get crabbed if left to one's self. I know that my house is a dull one"—

"Oh, no!" began Kitty.

"Dull for you at least," he went on, "as the children are too young to be companions, and I too old and too careworn."

He said this with a little sigh.

"It is not want of companionship that drives me to Mrs Wingfield's house, I assure you. It is because she is so kind to me, and is always wanting me to be with her."

"Could not you and Laura get up some small evening parties amongst the neighbours, by way of amusing yourselves? Pray understand that I wish you to do exactly as you like in that respect."

"You are very kind."

"And do not hesitate to ask down any relative or friend of your own, if you wish it. The house is so large that there is plenty of room, even if Regy comes home."

Kitty caught up the last words, "If Regy comes home," and looked inquisitive. Dr Norman explained the matter hastily. "The boy had been invited to stay with friends, and I shall urge him to do so."

"There is too much noise in the house when Regy is at home," he added; "I don't know how to support it;" and with this he left the room.

This explanation by no means satisfied Kitty. She did not care much about Regy's coming home, but she felt that Dr Norman had not given her a full explanation of the matter, and it puzzled her. Had Regy been getting into debt, or into any other scrape? Had Dr Norman any idea of his having made love to her?

Two or three days passed, and Regy's name was not mentioned; till one morning Dr Norman said that Regy had been invited to spend Christmas with some friends, and that he had accepted the invitation. Amongst the young people there was natural lamentation at this news; but Kitty talked of the

Christmas-tree, of the dance to follow, and of other bright things in prospect, so that the cloud was a transient one. She set to work about these festivities with no very light heart. It is not easy to live vicariously, and that is what she was trying to do. What part and lot had she with these gay young things? still less, what part and lot had she with a studious, unsociable man like Dr Norman? With Mrs Wingfield she felt at ease, but it was more than ever difficult for her to see her now. She never accepted an invitation to go to her house without some sort of discussion with Dr Norman beforehand; at times he would be hurt, at others irritated, never indifferent; and yet she went. It seemed hard to give up the only gaiety that came in her way, and Mrs Wingfield might prove a very useful friend. She once hinted this to Dr Norman, but he would not see her meaning, and stuck to his text—Mrs Wingfield was not a person to be intimate with. Kitty thought it a little unamiable of Dr Norman to say this, with the evident intention of keeping her away. She tried to serve two masters, yielding apparently to Dr Norman's wishes, and all the while growing more intimate with Mrs Wingfield.

Serving two masters is desperate work. Brains and nervous power wear away at a terrible rate under the unnatural tension imposed upon them, and one is almost sure to lose the game in the end.

A day or two before Christmas, she lunched with Mrs Wingfield; it was a pleasant thing to do. Mrs Wingfield was the quintessence of hospitality, and could, moreover, be very entertaining when alone with a friend. Kitty felt herself, for the time, the Kitty of old. She laughed, said smart things, made amusing commentaries on Mrs Wingfield's stories, and was altogether delightful.

Fortunately a snow-storm came on.

"I shall keep you till to-morrow," Mrs Wingfield said. "Oh, how nice that will be! Sit down, darling, in that arm-chair, put your feet on a footstool, and when we have each had just one little bit of sleep, we'll be entertaining again."

Kitty obeyed, and both ladies nodded and napped till it grew

dusk, and tea was brought in ; then they sat sipping it over the fire, in a luxury of growing confidence.

"I will tell you what I have been thinking of," Mrs Wingfield said, after a little pause, and looking straight into Kitty's face as she spoke. "I do so weary of living alone. I want some one to be fond of me, and help me to scold the servants and to choose my dresses. I should like to have you in my house always. Do you say Yes or No, Kitty ?"

Kitty's heart beat fast, but she controlled herself and spoke quite collectedly.

"Dear Myra !" she said, with a little surprised laugh, "how can one say Yes or No in a minute to such a proposal as that ? It takes one's breath away, like an offer of marriage."

"But if you had an offer of marriage you would say Yes or No at once. Women's opinions are always formed on some things."

Kitty took her friend's hand and pressed it gratefully.

"It is not myself I am considering," she said, "but others."

"What others ?" Mrs Wingfield asked.

Kitty mentioned the Normans as first claimants upon her ; then she talked very vaguely of old friends and connections at home—in Fulham.

"I have two homes and two families," she added, "and it would be difficult for me to break entirely from either. But I am grateful, dear Myra, and I should like to come to you better than anything. I should, indeed."

"How nice it would be ! Oh, how nice it would be !" Myra went on. "I would take you up to London with me for the season ; I would be exactly to you as an elder sister ; and if you married, I would give you a superb wedding breakfast."

Kitty kissed her friend in a tender, deprecating way, as if such goodness were quite too much for her.

"You hesitate ?" Mrs Wingfield said.

"Yes, I hesitate," Kitty answered ; "and I have not the courage to tell you why."

"You are too proud to accept anything from me."

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"I need not be very proud to shrink from accepting so much," Kitty answered; and then, still holding the tips of Myra's fingers, she made a long speech.

"You see, dearest Myra," she said, "that I am a very weak-minded creature, and should never be able to support the humiliation of being a poor church-mouse in a rich household. I should always be comparing myself to you—a tatterdemalion to a princess—and you would not like to feel that you were continually humiliating your friend in the eyes of the world. I am of good but poor family, and not one of my relations can help me to support the social position to which I was born. I have hardly any income. Dear Myra, how can I come to you so? If you were old, and disagreeable, and ugly, I would be to you as a kind of companion."

"I would give you a hundred a year to-morrow," interrupted Mrs Wingfield, "if you would come," snapping somewhat coarsely the silken thread of Kitty's sentimental discourse. "No one need know what arrangements we two make; I'll call you my cousin."

Kitty began to speak; then stopped, smiled hesitatingly, and finally said, with a sudden charming frankness—

"After all, Myra, I do love you, and I think if you gave me a left-off dress I would wear it for your sake."

"I would give you lots of new dresses," interrupted Mrs Wingfield.

Kitty went on—

"Suppose, dearest, that I do come to live with you; I must keep up the appearance of a lady, in order not to shame my friend; if I consented to be your butler, housekeeper, accountant—anything but companion, need our affections suffer because I accept wages in exchange? You know I must go out as governess when I leave Shelley House, or earn my living somehow."

"Do, do come to me," urged Mrs Wingfield; "it would be so much nicer than teaching for you, and nicer than anything for me." And the two ladies talked and talked till dinner-time, and Dr Norman's carriage, which had come to fetch Kitty, was

sent away in order that they might talk a little more ; and ere bed-time came it was all settled.

"There is one last thing I have to ask of you," Kitty said, as the two parted in Mrs Wingfield's dressing-room. "Let us keep our own counsel for the next few days. Dr Norman is a great deal worried just now; Clevy is home, and makes the children so noisy; and I am sure he would be greatly distressed at the bare mention of my leaving"—

"Being in love with you."

Kitty ignored the idea with a very great deal of composure, and added, "It is a compact, isn't it, Myra?"

Whereupon, Myra, who was getting sleepy, nodded in token of affirmation, gave Tom-tom, who slept on the landing, a little admonitory kick, which meant that he was to close the corridor and put out the lights; and then went off to bed, very satisfied with the turn affairs had taken. Kitty did not sleep much that night. Having made up her mind, she could not lay her head down on the pillow and sleep till the dawn, child-wise. She had not calculated upon any change of fortune coming so suddenly. A hundred a year and a home of ease seemed very great things to her; and she thought she could not be wrong in accepting them for a time. Kitty tacked this proviso to everything.

She would fain have become a fashionable lady, and lived after the manner of Mrs Wingfield; she would fain have married for love, and made Perry happy; she would fain have stayed with the Normans and made them happy too. How was she to choose the right casket?

It is true that she had consented, after great persuasion, to accept something in the shape of a salary from Dr Norman, when it was arranged that she should stay as companion to his children. But how different it would be to live with Myra!

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## CHAPTER XIII.

*KITTY'S CHRISTMAS—(CONTINUED).*

THE children's party occupied Kitty's time and thoughts so entirely next day, that she had no opportunity of dwelling upon her own affairs. She shut herself up for one quarter of an hour; but it was quite impossible to clear her thoughts, and resolve upon the best means of breaking her news to Dr Norman. He was so helpless, and she so helpful, that she knew he would set himself strongly against her taking such a step. And what then?

She went downstairs, and acted the part of hostess to thirty children perfectly, though she was wishing herself anywhere else.

It disappointed her a little that Dr Norman had placed no gift for her on the Christmas-tree. A silver thimble would have seemed gracious coming from him at such a time, or a sixpenny neck-ribbon. There was nothing; and yet Dr Norman accepted the slippers she had worked for him, as if a gift from her was natural and pleasant. The children all screamed out in a breath, "O, papa! have you nothing for Kitty?" But he changed the subject—a little awkwardly, Kitty thought. When all the young folks had gone, and even Laura's anxiety to help her friend had succumbed in the extreme of drowsiness, Dr Norman peeped into the drawing-room.

What a scene it was! The chairs were lying about in rows, like files of infantry under fire; the tables were overturned, and covered with shot and shell—in other words, balls and toys of every description; the old square piano might be called the Hougoumont of this domestic Waterloo, being barricaded to the summit with every available piece of furniture. Kitty moved amid the scene of destruction like an emblematic figure of peace. She had not been torn to pieces during Blindman's Buff; she had lost neither life nor limb in the fray of Hunt the Slipper. Her hair was smooth and bright, her pretty dress in no degree disordered, her movements slow and calm.

She did not know that Dr Norman was looking at her, and went her way, picking up Prissy's sash here, Laura's necklace there, with so womanly—nay, motherly—a care, that his eyes filled. He thought of his dead wife, and of the way in which she used to care for their children thus from morning till night. It seemed to him that any woman who so loved his children must be good, and tender, and true. On a sudden, Kitty looked up.

"These children, oh, these children!" she said, laughing. "It's a mercy we've a roof left to sleep under, Dr Norman."

"You ought to be asleep now," he answered; "how tired you look!"

She shut her eyes, and yawned, a very pretty little yawn, admitting that she was sleepy, adding, "Christmas Eve comes only once a year."

Dr Norman again pressed her to go to bed, holding out his hand as he said Good-night. It was a very cold little hand that she gave him, and he saw the fire was out.

"O, Miss Silver!" he cried, in dismay, "this is too bad of you. What shall we all do if you are ill? Come into my study and get warm before going upstairs. I have a fire there."

She felt cold, and followed him to the study, willingly. He put her in an arm-chair, made her drink a glass of wine, and, sitting opposite to her, talked of many things, in a friendly, confidential way. Kitty's old liking for Dr Norman came back again. He had seemed distant and self-absorbed of late, and she fancied that he was losing interest in her. But on this Christmas Eve he showed himself so alive to her comfort in small things, so chivalrously courteous, and so evidently pleased to be near her, that she felt as if she should never have courage to tell him her resolve. When she had said Good-night, and Dr Norman was left alone, he fell into a long train of thought. He had been trying for weeks past to make up his mind on a very important point, and the deliberation filled every leisure hour.

Should he marry Kitty?

He was not in love with her—she was not in love with him ; but they liked each other, and there were a hundred interests to bring them nearer, if he gave her his name. His first marriage had been perfect ; he did not expect a second to be like it ; but there could be degrees of domestic happiness, and he thought that Kitty would make him happier than any other woman he knew. She seemed very lonely ; she had no fortune ; he felt a man's instinct of protectiveness urging him to take her to his heart, and keep the world from being unkind to her evermore. Had Kitty been a coquette, impulsive, of a more demonstrative nature, he would have lacked courage to marry her ; but she was so calm, so even-tempered, so tender to the children, that he felt he should be running no risk for himself. It is natural for a man to think women happier when married. Dr Norman, though by no means an egotist, never feared that it could be a great risk for Kitty. True, she was young, and he was middle-aged ; but how many young girls do marry men double their years, and are happy !

Then Dr Norman thought of his children one at a time, and of the probable influence his second marriage would have upon them. He smiled as he recalled Regy's fancied passion—for Dr Norman had naturally heard rumours of this—thinking, what will poor foolish Regy say to me for having forestalled him ? But he reflected that Regy would be very little at home for the next few years, and, even if he were, could but be better off for having Kitty to take a motherly and sisterly care of him. With regard to Laura, Dr Norman had no misgivings. Laura adored Kitty, and was of so gentle and relying a nature that, without some strong arm to lean upon, she would be utterly lost. Kitty was strong, and Kitty was staunch. Laura would be infinitely happier for having Kitty's guidance always ; Clevy and Wattie wanted a mother sadly ; and though he doubted whether his passionate, petted little Prissy would ever yield to Kitty the allegiance which would be her due, he felt that Prissy needed her care more than any of his children. Then Dr Norman thought of himself. He was a very lonely man, and he was forty-five. Could he

support such loneliness always ? Would it not be better for him to drink the pleasant cup held to his lips rather than weep for ever for the wine spilled on the ground that could never be drunk any more ? The happiness of his first marriage made him shrink from marrying again ; but he was wearying of solitude.

How could these children ever fill it ? The boys would no sooner be grown to men than they were sure to make homes for themselves ; the girls might stay with him longer ; but what had Laura and he in common, much as they loved one another ? Prissy had much more character, and he felt that Prissy would grow up like her mother ; but she was a child at present, and it would be years before she could at all complete his life ; and what might not those intervening years bring forth ? Lastly, there was the consideration of Kitty's social position. He knew nothing of her family. Was it desirable to give this lady his name till he had learned a little about her own ? And then he laughed at himself for the foolish thought. What did it matter to him about Kitty's social position ? If she were not of herself good enough to be his wife, no lineage could render her so. Finally, he determined that Kitty Silver should be his wife.

Christmas-day at Shelley House was like Christmas-day anywhere else. To see the way in which Kitty went through the day's business was quite marvellous ; one could have sworn that she had made up Christmas parcels for the poor, had decorated churches with holly, had presented Sunday-school children with cakes and clothing and pretty speeches, had ordered Christmas feasts for the servants' hall, all her life. Her power of adapting herself to circumstances was really unusual, and she was ever a little enthusiastic, as if school children's cakes and servants' suppers were dear to her heart. When the business of the day had been gone through, she stole up to her bedroom, which Laura had turned into quite a pretty boudoir for her darling Miss Silver, and, drawing an easy chair to the fire, began to think. Ought she not tell Perry ? ought she not tell Dr Norman ; of the resolution she

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support such loneliness always ? Would it not be better for him to drink the pleasant cup held to his lips rather than weep for ever for the wine spilled on the ground that could never be drunk any more ? The happiness of his first marriage made him shrink from marrying again ; but he was wearying of solitude.

How could these children ever fill it ? The boys would no sooner be grown to men than they were sure to make homes for themselves ; the girls might stay with him longer ; but what had Laura and he in common, much as they loved one another ? Prissy had much more character, and he felt that Prissy would grow up like her mother ; but she was a child at present, and it would be years before she could at all complete his life ; and what might not those intervening years bring forth ? Lastly, there was the consideration of Kitty's social position. He knew nothing of her family. Was it desirable to give this lady his name till he had learned a little about her own ? And then he laughed at himself for the foolish thought. What did it matter to him about Kitty's social position ? If she were not of herself good enough to be his wife, no lineage could render her so. Finally, he determined that Kitty Silver should be his wife.

Christmas-day at Shelley House was like Christmas-day anywhere else. To see the way in which Kitty went through the day's business was quite marvellous ; one could have sworn that she had made up Christmas parcels for the poor, had decorated churches with holly, had presented Sunday-school children with cakes and clothing and pretty speeches, had ordered Christmas feasts for the servants' hall, all her life. Her power of adapting herself to circumstances was really unusual, and she was ever a little enthusiastic, as if school children's cakes and servants' suppers were dear to her heart. When the business of the day had been gone through, she stole up to her bedroom, which Laura had turned into quite a pretty boudoir for her darling Miss Silver, and, drawing an easy chair to the fire, began to think. Ought she not tell Perry ? ought she not tell Dr Norman ; of the resolution she

"It is so hard to say either Yes or No when we say it for life," she said, half-crying.

And then Dr Norman gently asked if he had not better decide for her, which he did in a way entirely satisfactory to himself.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### *A DILEMMA.*

How was she to tell Perry? How was she to tell Myra? How was she to tell Dr Norman that she had to break faith with these two in marrying him?

Poor Kitty found herself in one of those hopelessly perplexing situations which defy counsel, even supporting counsel to be at hand. She wanted to make Perry happy; she wanted to become a fashionable lady, and live with Mrs Wingfield; she wanted to marry a good man like Dr Norman, and devote herself to him and to his children all her life. But she could not do these three things, and she had chosen one of the three. Was her choice a wise one, and was it irrevocable? She could not bear to think that it was—much as she liked Dr Norman, she could not bear to think that.

On first coming from Dr Norman's study, with his kiss fresh upon her lips, and his frank words of affection and trust still sounding in her ears, she was on the point of writing a decisive letter to Perry, and another decisive letter to Myra; but when she sat down and took pen in hand, resolve and inclination were alike gone. For more than an hour she thought and thought and thought, without being able to come to any conclusion. Well, her promise to Dr Norman was not yet a day old, and there would surely be time and opportunity given her for deliberation. She must put it off till another day. So she dressed herself very carefully for the festive Christmas tea, wearing a new dress, and all the trinkets that Perry had ever given her, and went downstairs, not looking in the least like a person in deep perplexity.



After the tea, which was a very sumptuous one, and served in the servants' hall, Dr Norman drew his chair beside Kitty's, and watched the dancing with a smile on his face. Kitty looked bright too ; it was so natural to her to look bright when she thought a bright look would appear grateful to others ; besides which, she was pleased that Dr Norman should give up his evening's work for her. He seemed quite indifferent as to whether a domestic comment should be passed upon his conduct or no ; he was so frank by nature that it was impossible for him to modify his actions merely to suit other people, and Kitty liked him all the better for possessing a virtue which she almost regarded as a weakness.

" You have hitherto lived among artists, and people of talent," he said to her, as they both looked on, " and must have led a life of perpetual variety and amusement. Are you quite sure that you do not find this dull ? "

" It is so peaceful," Kitty said, " and peace is better than pleasure. I could not bear to live always in poverty."

Dr Norman's face clouded for a moment.

" I am not rich, and there are all the children to educate," he answered, uneasily. " I rank as a poor man among my friends and neighbours."

" O, Dr Norman ! you don't know what it is to be poor ! Why, I have known very nice clever people who have dined off dry bread many a time ; " and Kitty laughed, half sad, half merry.

" We shall not be so poor as that, Kitty," Dr Norman went on—it was the first time he had so called her—" and you have shown yourself so good and so clever that I know everything will go well in the house where you are at the head of it. Thank God, all the children love you. I would, on no account, have sacrificed my happiness to theirs ; but it has been as much almost for their sake as for mine that I have longed for you to become one of us."

All this was very practical, and yet Kitty found it pleasant. She had lived in the world too early and too long to entertain the ordinary feminine notion about love and marriage. To

have Dr Norman sitting by her side and discussing the future, as if they were friends of years' standing, was much more agreeable to her than any lover's platitudes would have been. Regy's love-making had movd her because he was young and eager, and she liked him; but she felt that she liked Dr Norman best—kind, considerate, and tender as he ever was, and as free from passion as herself.

Whilst Kitty was thinking these thoughts, Dr Norman was thinking how easy it would be to fall in love again, and how much more attractive Kitty had seemed since consenting to become his wife. He had always thought her handsome; but now he was always thinking of her as being handsome. What woman had such eyes, such vivacious expression, such shining hair, such graces of movement? He longed to know her better; to have her call him by his Christian name; to have *tête-à-tête* talks about common things between them; to feel that nothing could come in the way of his new, happier life. He had not yet asked Kitty when she would marry him; but he saw no reason she could have for delay, and he determined to tell his children of his coming marriage as soon as the time should be fixed for it.

Kitty's thoughts were less satisfactory. How should she tell Perry? How should she tell Mrs Wingfield? What would they think of her? Hoping for some miraculous piece of good fortune that should render her course easier by and by, she went to bed, and slept serenely.

A week passed without any miraculous piece of good fortune. Every day Kitty had risen from her bed with the thought, "I will really free myself from my burdens before night;" but night had come, and she bore her burdens still. One morning's post brought a wild note from Perry. He had torn out a leaf from his sketch-book, and had written across it, amid suggestive dashes of orange, and purple, and crimson, a snatch or two of Byronic, but none the less sincere, rhetoric. This did not help poor Kitty.

Another day, came a most coaxing but vehement letter from Myra. Myra must have her friend at once,—at once. Her

room was ready, numerous plans were formed for her pleasure; they were going up to London for the season, and afterwards to travel abroad. And this did not help Kitty.

She drew up the blinds on that New Year's morning, and looked drearily across the white fields. "How glad I shall be when the snow is gone!" she said, to herself; which meant, "How glad I shall be when I have chosen between them all, and it is over!"

But a week passed, and the snow was gone, and Kitty found herself in precisely the same position as she had done on New Year's day. She looked back upon that week with very little satisfaction. It might have been such a happy one; and what had it been, thanks to her own indecision? Every bit of bread had been turned into Dead Sea fruit, every drop of wine into gall. And why? Because she lacked courage to go and say to the man she had promised to marry—

"I have been acting unfairly to you, to another, and to myself. I was engaged to marry when your kind words came, and I had no courage to say so. Forgive me, and let me go."

Still less had she courage to go and say to Myra—

"I am going to marry Dr Norman—to give up gaieties and pleasures, and devote myself to his children. It is impossible that you and I can ever be such friends again as we have been."

A thousand times less could she write to Perry,—passionate, impulsive, true-hearted Perry—

"I have made up my mind to break the word that I gave you years ago, not because I love anybody else, not because I do not love you, but because you are poor, and I prize wealth beyond affection."

She could do neither of these things; she could not endure the idea of making any one unhappy who was kind to her, and she knew well enough how unhappy the truth must make Perry, and how it must disconcert Dr Norman.

Myra would not suffer in nearly the same degree; but she would suffer from mingled feelings of disappointment and

mortification, and would feel that she could never trust anybody again. Oh! what chance of peace was hers with so many retrIBUTions hanging over her head?

She was compelled to take one decisive step, however, which helped her to temporary peace. She could no longer keep Myra in ignorance as to her engagement. One morning, therefore, she set off in the snow, and found Myra eating her breakfast in her dressing-gown.

"Welcome, you little goose!" Myra cried, far too indolent to rise from her chair; "don't kiss me—I'm eating honey—but sit down, and Tom-tom shall bring you some tea."

Kitty kissed her dearest friend in spite of the command, and before she took off her cloak or tasted her tea, broke out with an explosive—

"I have promised to marry Dr Norman!"

Myra was one of those provoking persons who are never surprised at the right moment.

"I expected as much," she said, quite indifferently; "women can't help being fools, I suppose."

"You would think me a fool if I married him?" Kitty asked.

"That's quite out of the question. You can't do it, you mustn't do it, you won't do it."

"But I have promised."

"What could induce you to make such a promise? You are not a domestic person—the idea of having five step-children did not tempt you; Dr Norman is not the man for a clever woman like you to fall in love with—his position is not worth the sacrifice."

"You amuse me immensely when you talk in that strain," Kitty said, laughing. "You forget that I am nobody."

"You are a woman," Myra answered.

"Well!"

"That is a very unnecessary 'well'; you must know that a woman who is young, and clever, and handsome, is a power in society."

"I don't know that. It is not for either of those reasons

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that Dr Norman likes me well enough to marry. It is because I am kind to the children, and a pleasant piece of furniture in the house. If I were a mean-looking little person with a snub nose, it would have been the same."

"Not quite, my dear Kitty; you don't at all know the proportionate value of things in the world. You think a great deal too much of the relative worth of money."

"I suppose all poor people do."

"But experience ought to make you wiser. Who is most admired and sought after when I have a house full of people —you or I?"

"Yourself, naturally."

"I may appear to be so; but you have wit enough to see how much of this adoration is but skin-deep. Why," and here Myra broke into a little laugh, "you are like the rest of the world; you would not take half so much pains to please me if it were not that I am rich."

"You are arguing on my side now," Kitty said, taking up Myra's little hand and pressing it, by way of deprecating the cutting speech.

"No, I am not. I want you to see the difference between the homage that falls to my share and the homage that falls to yours. People fawn upon me, and flatter me, and I don't always dislike it, but I would ten times rather be you. Everybody admires you, everybody adores you; and for these reasons: It is a pleasure to look at you, it is a pleasure to listen to you, it is a pleasure to be liked by you. Nobody cares for my company as much as for yours. Taking all this into consideration, you must be acting like a child to marry the first man who proposes to you. You should wait."

"I don't quite see the use of waiting. I have no godmother to make me her heiress. I shall not grow more attractive as I grow older."

"Place yourself in my hands: I will use your brains, and you shall use my money."

"But, Myra, I have given my word, and Dr Norman really cares for me. What am I to do?"

"Tell the truth."

"Which? There are so many things I might say, and they are all true, but none the less unpleasant for him to hear."

"Say that if you marry him, you will be miserable—that is the simplest; then come to me, and see how happy we can make each other."

And Kitty listened and listened, assenting to everything; and finally went away, having promised Myra to break her promise to Dr Norman.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### *THE DEPARTURE FROM SHELLEY HOUSE.*

IT is astonishing how easily one finds excuses for putting off a disagreeable thing; and though Kitty had left Myra with a firm determination to free herself at once, a day or two passed, and she was still the betrothed wife of Dr Norman.

He noticed her troubled look affectionately, and would fain have had her more open with him; but she always put off his solicitude with a parrying smile. Sometimes she had a headache; once, it was Prissy who had vexed her, or Wattie. She had no courage to hint at the truth.

Dr Norman asked her point-blank one evening when she would marry him, thinking thus to bring matters to a climax. She blushed, looked distressed, and had hardly a word to say.

"Do not hurry yourself in deciding," he said, kindly. "For many reasons I could wish that the time should be soon, but I will wait as long as you like."

"I wanted to ask you"—

Kitty began, then broke off, and looked down upon the carpet. Dr Norman was silent, and she added, after a while—"To ask you for a little time."

He looked pained.

"Are you not quite sure that you have chosen wisely for yourself in choosing me?" he said.

"Oh yes! it is not that; it is that I ought to have told you before, how many promises I had made to other people."

"Not promises of marriage?" he said, smiling.

"I speak of promises made to Mrs Wingfield," Kitty answered; "she offered me a home with her long ago, and now she seems to think that, in spite of my engagement, I ought to go."

"For how long?"

Dr Norman's voice was bitter, and Kitty felt that kindness would have been less bearable just then. He seemed to be leading her into prevarications she had not dreamed of making. She caught eagerly at his last words.

"Would it vex you if I went—for a little time?"—thinking it would be so easy to write afterwards, and tell him the truth.

Dr Norman did not soon recover from his surprise.

"It would not vex me half so much if you wanted to pay a visit elsewhere; but, of course, if you wish it, I have nothing more to say."

"It is not that I wish it, so much as Mrs Wingfield"—

"In that case do not go. What is Mrs Wingfield to you?"

"She has been very kind to me"—

"That means—you have been very kind to her. I have often remonstrated with you for exerting yourself so unnecessarily on her behalf. She is good-natured, but selfish. I think her kindness to other people is generally so much capital very well invested."

This was a very cutting speech for a man like Dr Norman to make, and Kitty smarted under it. Not knowing how to get out of her difficulty, she said—

"I am afraid I must go. However selfish people are, one cannot treat them badly."

"If you really feel thus about the matter, it were better to

go at once, but only for a short time. That is understood between us, is it not?"

" You are very good to me ; I wish I had been firm from the beginning, and then this would not have happened," Kitty said ; " but perhaps it is better that I should go away for a little time. You will then be able to consider whether or no you have chosen wisely for yourself."

" Have we not both had time enough and to spare, to consider that ? "

Thus driven into a corner, Kitty took refuge in plain speaking.

" Sometimes—I know it is wrong and ungrateful of me—but I cannot help doubting," she said.

Dr Norman looked grave, and rose as if wishing to end the conversation.

" Then by all means pay the proposed visit. Give yourself time to think, and if—as I hope and trust—you will come back to me for once and for all, it shall not be my fault if you regret it."

He left her a little ceremoniously.

Kitty lost no time in making preparations for departure. When alone in her room she wore a brighter face. It would be a pleasant life at Mrs Wingfield's, she thought, without children to amuse and look after all day long, with only one person instead of a dozen to please, with a carriage and men-servants at command, and an elegant drawing-room, and pleasant ladies and gentlemen paying morning visits.

The children had a thousand remarks to make at breakfast next morning. Dr Norman quietly looked up from his plate, and asked Kitty if she were going that day. She sighed and said Yes, and then he opened his letters with rather a savage air. She could see that he loved her, that he trusted her, but that he was deeply hurt at her going. When Laura found herself with Kitty alone, she burst into tears, and, almost on her knees, entreated her to stay with them. The child loved Kitty passionately, and clung to her in a passion of grief.

"It will be so miserable without you," was all she could say for her tears. It was in such moments that Kitty Silver was unrivalled. A kiss from her lips, a touch of her hands, a whispered word of insinuating affection, and all Laura's grief seemed gone. She was ready to let Kitty go that moment, and to love her all the better for trampling on her poor little heart.

"That is my sensible little Laura," Kitty said; "and now you must do your best to make everybody gay and happy during my absence."

"You will be back in a month?" pleaded Laura, her sweet eyes full of tears.

"What folly to talk of the time! Let us make it endurable, and then it will go all the quicker. Now, you must promise me three things. In the first place, never to distrust me under any circumstances; in the second, never to despise me; in the third, never to hate me."

"O, Kitty!" Laura remonstrated.

"My dear, it is not impossible to distrust, despise, nay, hate, people one once looked upon as angels. You know circumstances force people into doing what seem very strange things, and then they get blamed. How can I tell what I may be driven to do?"

Laura lay at Kitty's feet—a pretty heap of curling fair hair, pink complexion, and bright blue drapery.

"As if you would ever make people angry," she said, kissing the slender white fingers that played with her hair; "you might make them unhappy, but angry—never."

"Little flatterer, I am but mortal,—a little worse than other mortals, if anything; but now you shall hear how easy I could appear quite villainous. Supposing—we may as well suppose a strong case—supposing that I were never to marry your father at all!"

Laura, who had naturally welcomed the probability of a marriage between Dr Norman and Kitty as the consummation of happiness, treated this speech as a cruel joke.

"You couldn't do that, and you wouldn't do it," she said.

Kitty urged the possibility of such conduct on her part.

"I could if I would, you know," she whispered, looking down upon Laura in her supreme, syren-like way. "Though Dr Norman is your father, and so good that everybody loves him, he is but a man, and we are women, you know."

And she turned her handsome head in a way that expressed some such sentiment as this:—Women, by virtue of sex, are such very superior creatures, and have a right to lord it over their slaves. It might have been an unwholesome lesson for a less gentle nature than Laura's.

"But why should you treat him badly, when you are so fond of him?"

"I don't want to treat him badly—I shouldn't do it willingly. I say, supposing that some very strong temptation should come in the way, and I—who am the weakest of weak creatures where my own will is concerned—should give way, would you hate, or pity me?"

"I don't know," Laura said; "I don't want to think of having to do either. I'm quite sure that, if you did worse things than disappoint papa, and all of us, I should go on loving you all the same, just because I couldn't help it."

"Which proves that you are a little goose," Kitty answered; "but, now, help me to pack, for Mrs Wingfield begged that I would go in time for lunch."

Kitty's going was so sudden, that the whole family at Shelley House felt as if a tooth had been drawn. When Mrs Wingfield's hated carriage drove up—for, good as were all the Normans, they could hate any one or anything that robbed them of Kitty—there was a universal feeling of consternation. The children cried; but that was only an outburst of passing grief; none of them said what was in each little heart—that she was doing an ungrateful thing.

Dr Norman helped her courteously into the carriage, handed in her reticule, umbrella, and cloak, then pressed her hand as an ordinary well-wisher might have done, raising his hat ceremoniously as she drove off. What a forlorn house it seemed without her! Dr Norman felt ashamed of himself for

the accumulation of chagrin that he could not shake off. He would fain have shut up every recollection of her in the most secret recess of his mind till she was again by his side. He could not bear that his children and servants should see what he suffered, and made an errand to London, thereby hoping to bridge over the absence that he hoped, but did not feel quite sure, would end well.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

*IN PARIS.*

IT is spring-time in Paris,—the ever gay, ever gracious, ever youthful city. What a Barmecide's feast is always spread there for the hungry! How the merry tunes strike upon weary ears! How victoriously the carriage wheels of the rich dash along the streets, driving the meanly clad and the Bohemians into the gutters!

Kitty was one of the victorious ones now, and leaned back in Myra's carriage, as if soft cushions, obsequious lacqueys, and high-stepping bays had been everyday things with her, from her childhood upwards. It was quite wonderful how prosperity, in any shape, seemed to fit her like a glove. She grew plumper and prettier with every new phase of it, and sometimes looked at herself in the glass, saying, "Can it be my old self, Kitty Silver, now so amiable and youthful, and pleasant to look at—my old, thin, sallow, soured, sharp-tongued self?"

Myra had come to Paris in a pet with some relations at home, and had skilfully managed to bring her new friend with her. The matter, as may be well imagined, had been one of great difficulty. For Dr Norman had not readily yielded, either to Myra's obvious little by-play, or to Kitty's apologetic and insinuating artifices. He was eventually worsted, of course; what man is not worsted in a contest with women? but he had not yielded with the best grace in

the world. His disappointment had been bitter, and his anger quiet, though deep. How it would all end, neither he nor Kitty could tell in their heart of hearts. They had hardly quarrelled ; they had certainly not parted with any understanding that the parting was to be more than temporary ; yet time, as it wore on, seemed to divide them more and more.

They wrote to each other still. It was so easy to write friendly letters, about the children, and old times and happy days that were to repeat themselves by and by ; and, without touching on delicate ground, such letters seemed safe, and were perhaps consolatory.

Kitty blamed Myra for her own apparent shortcomings ; it was always Myra, who would persist in keeping her away ; Myra, who wanted her all to herself. Myra was represented as the tempter and delinquent from the beginning to the end. And Dr Norman tried to believe that it was so.

The life she was leading could hardly have been more pleasant. She was running the giddy round of vain delights all day long ; living in a world made up of Gounod's music, drives, dinners, fashionable talk, and everything else that was light, graceful, and sparkling.

How she loved it all ! the constant business of doing nothing, the interminable repetition of pleasure and fatigue, the long luxurious sleeps on lace-bordered pillows.

She was not, however, wholly free from disturbing retrospections and dreams. She could hardly forget the vagabond life in Fulham, the unvarying kindness of Shelley House, and the two men she had promised to marry. Moreover, she did not want to spend all her life with Myra, and was conscious of new ambitions, and new powers of attaining them.

She recalled her early years with alternate sighs of self-commiseration and complacency. In those times it had been a red-letter day, a shower of sugar plums, to walk to the theatre, sit in the pit, and return home in an omnibus. She had gone to some of the smaller theatres thus, and nothing could have been gayer. Occasionally, there had been amateur representa-

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tions by Perry's friends, concluding with cheap, noisy, deliciously unwholesome little suppers behind the scenes.

The company had not been refined ; conversation was not strictly limited to such subjects as are discussed in a drawing-room ; manners had been a little free and easy ; yet Kitty owned to herself that she was not living amongst better people now. Those light-hearted, free-thinking, free-talking friends of Bohemia, had sadly neglected going to church, and many outward conventionalities ; but how full to overflowing were they of the charity that thinketh no evil, a thing Kitty now heard of every Sunday ! She marvelled how she could have existed so long in what now seemed to her a social heathendom. Kitty was learning new lessons in etiquette every day, and, it must be confessed, went through the task in a tractable spirit. She learned that it was disreputable to read a shabby novel with one's feet on the fender, to blacken one's fingers with roasting chestnuts, to walk out in wet weather, to eat penny ices—to do a hundred and one things as natural to one of her bringing up, as cracking nuts to young gorillas. She must neither eat, drink, laugh, nor talk in the old way, nor live to the old merry tune. Every act of daily life must now be set as it were to the slowest time, and such setting is not learned in a day.

Kitty proved an apt pupil, and soon became an adept in the art of treating people exactly according to their deserts—a very difficult art, by the way—and one only understood by those who dwell within the precincts of *Vanity Fair*.

Her little craft just newly rigged, none gayer than Kitty as she set out alone on high seas. She feared neither shoals nor storms ; how should she, having such infinite trust in herself, who acted alike the part of pilot and steersman ? She felt that she could afford to be gay, having hitherto waged successful war with the world—having proved herself in many a fight, a feminine Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche*. What astonished her hourly and daily, was her own popularity. She was popular with all the world—with the young, with the old, with the beautiful, and with the ugly. How did this come to pass ?

She had no other allies, but a pair of eyes that looked wonderful things, and a sweet insinuating voice, and a ready wit. Thus armed, though obscure, she became sought after and fêted wherever she went ; though poor, she was made to feel rich ; though virtually homeless and friendless, she had homes and friends without number.

If Kitty flattered and fawned a little upon those who were clad in purple and fine linen, was she not following the example of the world and all wise dogs, who wag their tails to those who have big bones to give away ? Was she to blame because she picked her bone and was happy ? It is not everybody's fortune to wag the tail to such advantage. And after all, does not nineteenth century civilisation set us bartering our goods and chattels, moral and material, after the fashion of South Sea Islanders ? How many of our friendships are wholly disinterested ? How many of our hospitalities are as genuine as the desert fare of *cous-cous-sou* and spring water, offered by every Bedouin to the passer-by ? He who pets his poor relation's dog is almost as rare as a saint.

It is very easy to be good-tempered in Paris, and Myra and Kitty were yet in what may be termed the honeymoon state of friendship.

They seemed to have discovered a mine of comfort and delight in each other. If Myra was a host in herself, Kitty was a legion. They were continually making mutual discoveries, as pleasant as they were unexpected. Kitty had so much wit, Myra so much sensibility ; Kitty was a genius, Myra a critic ; and looking at the world through each other's eyes, they contrived to see a great deal.

They had plenty of friends, and visited or went sight-seeing every day. Kitty had learned to know Paris thoroughly in former days, and with her for cicerone, Myra found Paris a wholly different and much more delightful place than formerly. A hundred harmless amusements were thought of that do not come in the way of ordinary pleasure-seekers.

Kitty was equally clever in picking out the plums of whatever social pudding came in the way ; she ignored dull people

perfectly, and never lost sight of any one who was pleasant or profitable.

They had a few French friends ; and, though neither Myra nor Kitty could speak good French, they were both delightful in French eyes, for they dressed unexceptionably—a crowning glory to Englishwomen !—kept up an elegant establishment, and were so gay, so charming, and so clever, as to place themselves above French compassion. Kitty had been originally engaged as Myra's confidential companion, at a salary of a hundred a year; but how could such a contract exist between two friends who had become all in all to each other ? Things did not alter all at once, but Myra and Kitty both grew so sensitive where money was concerned, that the former state of things had become intolerable. Kitty, one of Myra's paid servants !—Kitty's affectionate observances paid for by wages !—Kitty, Myra's dependant, who was so much her superior ! It was not to be thought of.

So from Myra saying such things as these—

“ O Kitty ! it is quite absurd to go on in this way—you know it is. If you won't consent to live with me, and share what I have as a sister might do, I'll run away from you.”

Or,—

“ Why should we keep up such shams, Kitty ? I do not really pay you for what you do ; I could not, if I gave you all I had. You shall, at any rate, be my equal in such things as can be given away. You understand what I mean ? ”

And Myra had said much tending to the same point, till Kitty gave way, and the two now lived together like sisters, sharing the good things of fortune equally.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

IT is very fashionable to be busy, and Miss Silver was now always too busy to see any one but her dearest friends. As,

however, very few people were ever sent away, her dearest friends must have been legion.

"I see nobody," she said again and again to her maid Françine, "but admit So-and-So all the same." The last clause, however, only applied to certain people whose name Françine knew by heart.

Mr and Mrs Nobody were sent away with no sort of ceremony. People worth knowing, that is, people with big purses, big names, or big anything, were admitted and announced with a flourish of trumpets. Poor little Françine, who was a peasant girl from Normandy, adored "Mademoiselle Silvare" as much as anybody, and adored everybody else for doing the same. She was not too simple to understand how matters stood. Madame Wingfield, with the rosy face and round eyes, and the dimpled hands that dropped their hold of everything, had the money, and Mademoiselle had the brains to make Madame's money worth having. Françine, foolish little thing as she was, saw it all clearly enough, and envied Kitty's gifts, that made her so necessary to other people. All day long the same sum was going on : Mademoiselle's cleverness + Mademoiselle's power of fascination = Madame's livres sterling.

Kitty certainly initiated Myra into the art of leading a pleasant life ; and did not Myra do well to be grateful ? She had suffered terribly from *ennui* till Kitty's era, in spite of the natural advantages of independence, wealth, and position. Now she found every day delightful, every bit of bread sweet as a freshly-gathered nut. She had plenty of flattery, as much homage as she well knew what to do with, and only enough leisure to give zest to gaiety. Her "At Homes" were pronounced charming ; her little dinners, perfect ; her maid-servants, angels ; her men-servants, archangels ; and the whole transformation was Kitty's work !

How could Kitty be sufficiently extolled, petted, rewarded ! Myra was by nature Kitty's inferior, but she had it in her power to make her happy, which she did in her own lazy way. Kitty was told to get this and that luxury for herself, and she got it. Kitty was told to instal herself in such and such a

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room, and she obeyed. Her room was the crowning glory of Kitty's existence. Like all women, she loved pretty things ; it was chiefly her craving for pretty things that had led her out of Bohemia ; here she had them, enough and to spare. No duchess had softer carpets, easier arm-chairs, richer curtains, than she, in the fashionable apartments in which they were located. She had an elegant little piano, and took lessons in singing, practising the new operas out of music-books bound in white and gold. The last new drama of Emile Augier, the last new novel of Cherbuliez or Octave Feuillet, the last number of the *Révue des Deux Mondes*, lay on her table, for she affected literary dilettantism now, and could discuss any subject whatever, from Comtism to the Mexican Loan downwards, with piquancy if not with discrimination.

She was wonderful, this Kitty Silver ! and Monsieur D—, a member of the Institute, who attended Madame Wingfield's soirées, sat at her feet, and liked to hear her talk better than any of his associates. She was strong on politics too, and Myra was occasionally honoured by the visit of Monsieur le Comte de —, and Monsieur L—, both of whom were statesmen, but not too much lifted above ordinary mortals to appreciate the bright wit, or downright practical wisdom, of an Englishwoman, who always looked handsome, and was always dressed perfectly.

For dress is said to be the most important art in a woman's educational curriculum, and Kitty had mastered it thoroughly. She knew exactly where good taste ends and bad taste begins ; and it was no small credit to her that not even an envious tongue could find anything to say against her milliner or herself. Such a triumph is not obtained without effort, and it may be safely affirmed that, what with the adornment of her outer, and the education of her inner, woman, Kitty had not much time to spare.

Things which come naturally to other ladies had to be acquired by her, and she was ever on the alert lest she should be caught tripping. She was seldom caught tripping. Ah ! she was wonderful !

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All circumstances considered, it was no wonder that Myra and Kitty were both popular, and that their drawing-room was filled with pleasant people whenever they chose to throw it open. It was curious that, though Kitty was the most admired, it was always Myra to whom men made proposals of marriage, and Myra's suitors would have become quite troublesome without Kitty to keep them off. It was so natural to Myra to find men pleasant when they paid court to her, and she seemed such a confiding little thing, that if Kitty had not acted the part of the Dragon, the golden apples would have been stolen by the first audacious adventurer.

Once Myra had said, after a long talk about lovers and affairs in general—

“I can't make out how it is that you are not jealous, Kitty. I never had a friend who was not jealous before. I suppose it is because you have wit enough to see that people care for me because I am rich and stupid, and for you because you are clever and handsome. I wish I were you.”

“And I wish I were you,” said Kitty, caressing her patroness as if she were a child; “I wish I were you.”

And she looked up fondly into her face as she spoke.

“Oh, you wouldn't like it,” said Myra, gravely comic; “you would find it dull. Just compare the abundance of things in your mind to the emptiness of mine. You think more in five minutes than I do in a day.”

“I wish I didn't think so much, sometimes,” Kitty said; “but I suppose one can't help it.”

“When two people live together, one of them must think, and thinking is hard work for women. Wouldn't it be better for us both if I were to marry? I don't wish to marry, I like my freedom so much, but marriage has advantages.”

And Myra pursed her little mouth and looked contemplative.

Kitty looked contemplative too.

“There is time enough for that,” she said; “we are very happy as we are!”

“We might go on being happy just the same,” said Myra;

"love for a man would never be much more to me than friendship for you. People scoff at women's friendships, but I am sure they are worth as much as anything else in the world."

"Then why marry at all?" said Kitty, looking up.

"Because," Myra said, "I think if you go on working so hard for me, I shall grow to be a bugbear to you in time, and that would be wretched."

"Never! never!" cried Kitty, emphatically, pressing her friend's hand. "Never!"

"It would not be your fault, but in the natural course of things. No one's patience lasts for ever; and, you know, things do vex you sometimes."

This was said in allusion to one or two bursts of vexation on Kitty's part, when people had been provoking, servants dilatory, dressmakers unpunctual, or Myra herself intractable in little things. Can we act the part of angels always? Will any silken slipper cover the foot of clay?

Kitty suffered patiently a reproach that she felt she did not deserve. From that time she carefully kept out of Myra's sight any stones that clogged the domestic wheels, whether little or large, and Myra said no more about marrying. It must be confessed that Kitty's part of the compact was by far the hardest to keep. Myra gave what had cost her nothing—rank, money, ease; but Kitty gave time, thought, character, and capabilities, service of brain and lip without stint or spare.

One morning she was busily engaged in making a head-dress for Myra, when Françine came in, looking more puzzled than it was her wont to do; for Françine's mistress was, algebraically speaking, an unknown quantity to her, and she was constantly wishing that Kitty were less clever, or that she herself were less stupid.

For instance, there had come to-day to the door a little shy, ill-dressed girl, who wore a broad-brimmed straw hat, and carried a cotton umbrella, asking in broken French to see Mademoiselle Silver, her dearest friend.

Françine went with her story to Kitty, half-crying with embarrassment, and Kitty had said, looking cross, but not unpleasant—

“ You little goose, Françine ! haven’t I told you a dozen times that my dearest friends never carry umbrellas—and cotton ones, too ! preposterous ! One of the dressmaker’s English girls, of course ; I can’t see her now.”

“ Mais non, Mademoiselle,” began Françine, “ elle vient d’arriver d’Angleterre, et s’appelle—s’appelle—mon Dieu, qu’est-ce que c’est que ce nom-là ! Ah ! Normand, c’est ça.”

Kitty suddenly seemed to see a hair on the carpet, and stooped to pick it up.

Laura in Paris ! She turned hot and cold, and sick with dismay. How could she see her ? How could she excuse herself from seeing her ? What could she say to her ?

She rose and went to the open window, feeling stifled. Hundreds of painful thoughts were rushing through her mind. If Laura were in Paris, surely Dr Norman was in Paris too ; and if Dr Norman, Prissy and Wattie. What a scandal would be created by their downright homely ways ! and Dr Norman might perhaps press his suit upon her. How could she shield herself from his dreaded affection ?

In this first moment of overwhelming agitation, it seemed possible to her to do a cowardly and heartless thing—namely, to deny herself to Laura, free herself—it is true, by a piece of falseness—from the slavery of sentiment to which she had so long subjected herself. But she paused before doing this thing, and the pause saved her.

“ Françine,” she said, sharply, “ this demoiselle is English, and does not know French customs. But how could you be so stupid as not to see by a glance that she was a lady ? Admit her at once.”

And, in another moment, Laura and Kitty were kissing each other, woman-wise, and Laura could do nothing but laugh and cry, feeling herself in such an uncertain sort of Paradise !

“ I never dreamed of seeing you,” Kitty said, holding the

child's pink cheeks between her hands, and looking at her earnestly,—“you little, constant, foolish, impatient thing !”

“I thought I should never see you again,” Laura said, shyly. “What a beautiful room this is, and how beautiful you are in your white morning-gown !”

“And how pretty somebody else has grown ! though just a little dishevelled, and crumpled, and bespattered at this present moment. Let us take off your hat and cloak, and smooth your hair, and settle you comfortably in this fauteuil. I keep it for my pets, and nobody else,” Kitty added, sweetly.

“It seems a shame to put my long wet hair on these blue velvet cushions,” Laura said, looking at all Kitty’s elegant surroundings with a child’s wonder.

“Nonsense ; what is upholstery for but to use ? ” answered Kitty, with the grand air of one who has just come into a fortune. “But now, tell me news of you all. Is Dr Norman in Paris ? ”

“Papa and Prissy and I came yesterday,” began Laura.

“Without the boys ? ”

“Yes ; Wattie is gone to school now.”

“And how long do you stay ? ”

“I don’t know, it depends”—Laura hesitated, lacking courage to add—“upon you.”

“And where are you staying ? ”

Laura named a quiet, old-fashioned hotel in the Faubourg St Germain, and mentioned that she had come to see her quite of her own accord, adding—

“Papa says he shall write to you.”

“I am afraid that I shall have to appear very inhospitable,” Kitty said ; “but, of course, not being in my own house, I can’t invite my friends as I should like to do ; you shall invite me instead,” she added, coaxingly ; and, after some further talk, said, “But now I am afraid I must send you away, you dear, good little pet, and you must come some other time to see all my pretty things, for to-day I have many things to do for Mrs Wingfield, and you wouldn’t have me get scolded on your account, would you ? ”

"Nobody ever scolds you," Laura said.

"But see all those letters to answer, and she has friends coming to breakfast at twelve."

"And when will you come to see us?"

"As if I could tell you now, dear child! But I will come, of course I will, and I am so pleased to see you again. Put this little box of bonbons in your pocket for Prissy,—and give my love to all; I dare not keep you any longer, darling. Good-bye."

Truth to say, Kitty had heard a ring at the outer door, and was anxious to get rid of one visitor before another should come. How could she tell who the next comers might be? Perhaps some fashionable friends; and what would they think of her little provincial Laura?

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *SURPRISE UPON SURPRISE.*

LAURA went away, smiling to herself for joy at having found her long-lost treasure, and much too happy and too dazzled by the brilliancy of Kitty's new position to think of possible disappointment for herself just then. Greatly to her surprise, a friendly voice uttered her name, and a friendly hand was laid on her shoulder as she reached the threshold.

"My stars, if it isn't little Laura Norman!"

"O! Mrs Cornford, it's you!"

And Laura, like the loving little thing she was, kissed her old drawing-mistress warmly, and could not seem glad enough to see her again. It was so easy to Laura to love people when she felt happy,—and she felt quite happy just now.

"Well," said Mrs Cornford, in that delightful unconsciousness of cotton gloves, be-painted gown, disreputable bonnet, and unkempt hair, that is second nature to your veritable Bohemian, "so you have been paying court to our runaway daughter of Mammon, have you?"

"O, Mrs Cornford!"

"O, Miss Laura! if you haven't eyes in your head I have, and can tell a mountebank in a moment, though he has got on his plain clothes. Our good Kitty's inner woman is like a mountebank, always dressed in plain clothes ; and so stupid are all of you that none but I have had the sense to find it out."

Had Laura's old teacher struck her, she could hardly have felt more hurt or startled ; to her, Kitty's self was sacred as the Commander of the Faithful to all true Mussulmans ; and being too simple to fathom Mrs Cornford's psychological subtleties, she could not bear her name to be unceremoniously used.

"It's of no use mincing matters, my dear," Mrs Cornford continued, with a pat on the child's shoulder. "Kitty is a lover of Mammon, but it's only the old birds who know how people set traps, and when you have been caught once or twice you will be wiser. I suppose you are all here in a lump?"

"Yes ; that is, papa and my little sister are here."

"We are staying in the Rue de Trévisé, numero quatre, but I am sure to be found in the Louvre almost every morning. Come and see me at which place you like best, my dear. On second thoughts, perhaps your papa might not like you to come to my quarters ; but the Louvre is always respectable. You may paint with me sometimes, if you like." Then, with a hasty good-bye, they parted.

When Françine, for the second time that day, opened the door to a shabbily-dressed lady, who had evidently walked a long distance in the rain, her mind misgave her as to what she ought to do ; but rough and ready speech carries almost as much weight with the uneducated as fine clothes and fine manners, and Mrs Cornford spoke French roughly, but readily enough. Mrs Cornford, moreover, was a large person; Françine was small, and Françine was awed. Mrs Cornford was ushered in.

Kitty's little room was quite a picture of artistic finish and fancy, and the first thought that rose to Polly Cornford's mind was—The little artful creature ! who would have thought of her stealing all this taste from poor Perry and me ? Her

quick, unforgetting artist's eye took in every element of harmony in a moment—the mellow tints of the wall, the bright, rich carpet, the sober use of colour everywhere, the taste displayed in every bit of furniture. Kitty had used every available means to make her room perfect, and what woman does not look twice as attractive in a beautiful room? To Mrs Cornford, Kitty looked metamorphosed, as she advanced, dressed in an elegant morning dress of white cashmere, her hair smooth, her slippers of velvet richly embroidered.

But the vision of kind, slatternly, slangy, irrevocably Bohemian Polly Cornford came upon Kitty like a forgotten promise, or a bank failure, that makes one grow suddenly old and ugly. It is, however, against the laws of decent society that this sort of feeling should ever be expressed, and Kitty greeted her friend as if at that particular moment she thought her an angel.

"My stars!" said Mrs Cornford, going from one piece of furniture to the other, with her glass to her eye, as soon as the first words of greeting were over. "My stars! Kitty, in what coin do you pay for all this? What a delicious colour your paper is, to be sure! I'll use it for my next background; and what sweet little silly things in Sèvres on your cabinet! and you've got one or two pictures too—a real chef-d'œuvre this, on my soul! and the genuine Doré's *Don Quichotte*; and my! what a jolly carpet!"

"Algerian," said Kitty, glad to find a topic; "isn't it a lovely thing? what reds, what greens, and what yellows! and look at all the different patterns."

"I say, Kitty, is it your own, and will you lend it to me? I'm painting a picture out of the '*Arabian Nights*,' and your carpet is just what I want."

"Of course," Kitty said.

"But I ought not to have asked you for the loan of it yet, for you mayn't like to lend your carpets to me after I have said my say."

Kitty winced, but would not let her wincing be palpable for worlds.

"As if anything you could say would make me disagreeable," she said, sweetly; "but take off your cloak, and we will have coffee, and talk over that."

She rang the bell, and ordered Francine to bring up coffee and cakes, with less authority than usual. Poor Kitty! Mrs Cornford's visit was less bearable to her than a neuralgic attack.

"The chicks are here," began Mrs Cornford.

"Oh!" Kitty answered, smiling.

"And the Bianchis are here."

"Oh!" Kitty said, still suave.

"And Perry is here."

"Oh!" Kitty said, trying to smile, but groaning inwardly.

"And we are going to make a regular season in Paris, and stay I don't know how long. Don't say you are glad, Kitty; I know in your heart you are thinking what a horrid lump of us to be here, and wishing that we were all safe at home in Paradise Place."

"How can you say such things? If they were true, I should be the most ungrateful wretch under the sun."

"Everything is possible in this world," said Mrs Cornford, coolly, "and, if I must speak the plain truth, my dear, our faith in you is looking a little the worse for the wear."

Kitty dropped into a chair, biting one of her long locks savagely, and sat still.

"I don't say you are ungrateful," Mrs Cornford went on; "there is no sort of need for old friends to be grateful to one another."

Here Kitty came to Mrs Cornford's side, and put her arms about her deprecatingly, and interposed,—

"My dear Polly, how absurd to say that I have no need to be grateful to you!" adding, with tears and a fine, tremulous burst of passion, "you dear, good, ill-repaid, generous creature!"

"Pooh, pooh! I'm a hard working, out-at-elbow, vulgar wretch, that's what I am; and you're quite a fashionable lady now, and wouldn't come and call on me in my five-pair back

in broad daylight, if it would save my heart from breaking. I know what saints you swear by, Kitty, and your creeds and catechisms too."

"And what are they?" said Kitty, looking a little pale, but resolutely determined to play the victim.

"I suppose your creed is," began Mrs Cornford, "to love your neighbour as yourself, if he's rich, lives in a big house, and keeps a flunkey; and to fall down and worship one god only—Mammon the Mighty—and to him to sell your soul."

"I don't know why women should be so harshly judged," Kitty said, penitently, but proudly: "a man gets commended for trying to better his condition; I have only done that."

"You have only done that, I know; but there are more ways than one, Kitty, of making one's self smart at a fair; one's fine clothes may be bought, borrowed, or stolen"—

"What do you mean?" asked Kitty.

"You have come mighty fine to the fair, Kitty, but I am much afraid you haven't paid for all your gewgaws in good money that rings when you try it."

"My dear Polly, how absurd you are!"

"Well, let us try your money. We'll say you've paid so many smiles, and so many sweet speeches for this jolly little boudoir; will you swear them to be all true and genuine? Or, let us take the carriage you drive in,—what does that cost you? Have you a regular tariff of prices, or do you bargain hap-hazard for all these good things? And truffles—I dare say you eat truffles now—do you buy them by the gross, for a few little flatteries of extra flavour?"

Kitty did not know whether to laugh or to cry, whether to take Mrs Cornford's sarcasms seriously or in jest, whether to be indignant or humble.

She followed a middle course.

"Polly," she said, "if I did not love you, I verily believe I should forget all that I owed you in the old days, and be ready to hate you for saying such things of me now. But though I am foolish, and vain, and weak, I do love you—I do indeed love you, Polly, and you must not cast me off."

And saying this, she came close to Mrs Cornford's side, and wound her arms round her neck, and kissed her on the cheek, knowing—who so well?—that Mrs Cornford could no more resist her than all the rest of the world.

"You little, insinuating, artful, clever thing!" Mrs Cornford began; but her mouth was stopped by Kitty's hand.

"No, I'm not insinuating, and I'm not artful," she said; "I'm your dear, naughty prodigal, that's what I am; and though you scold me to-day, you'll kill the fatted calf for me to-morrow—I know you will, you darling."

"Not I," said Mrs Cornford, good-tempered in spite of herself; "not I, Miss Kitty Silver. If you come, which I know you won't, I shall give you nothing but a brown crust, and lots of scolding. I live ever so high up in an attic, you know, in a dingy little street, and your love for me will hardly bring you there, I think."

"As if I should not come to see you," Kitty interposed deeply hurt.

"Well, will you come in to-night? Perry has asked a chum or two to dinner, and we are going to the Opéra Comique afterwards."

Kitty hesitated.

"I should like it dearly; but Mrs Wingfield might object."

"Come on Sunday, then; we'll go to Saint Cloud, and have dinner at such a snug little cabaret Perry knows of."

"We always go to church on Sundays," Kitty said, with some reluctance.

"Eh, go your ways, Kitty, to church and the devil!" Mrs Cornford said, rising to go; "and don't come to see me, till you turn poor and honest again,—which won't be yet, I fancy."

She put on her cloak, and would have gone away abruptly, but Kitty delayed her a little.

"I will come and see you, I will, I will," she whispered; "give my dear love to Perry, and the children, and everybody, and say so."

And she kissed her friend, and clung to her.

"I shall tell 'em the truth, and nothing but the truth," Mrs Cornford said ; "and when you see 'em you can add as much to it as you like. I shall tell 'em how I found you in a wonderful frock fit for a duchess, and a diamond ring on your finger, and a gold chain round your neck, and silk stockings on your feet. This is what I shall tell 'em, Kitty, without adding or diminishing,—and so I promise you. We live in the Rue de Trévisé, numero quatre. It's a shabby place ; don't tell the grand folks if ever you come there. Good-bye ! "

And with that Mrs Cornford went, leaving Kitty abashed, terrified, full of misgiving.

How should she shield herself from all the new difficulties and perplexities looming in the distance ?

She could not break from these old, true friends ; but how to cleave to them, how to be kind to them, without bitterest shame and mortification ? Why—oh, why had they come to disturb her peace ?

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### *CONFESSiON AND ABSOLUTION.*

If Laura's visit had been a thorn in Kitty's side, it may be imagined that Mrs Cornford's was two thorns ; and they pricked mercilessly. All the pleasantness of this Parisian phase of life was gone, snuffed out in a moment like a wax light exposed to sudden blasts.

Kitty's gilded cage held an unhappy bird for a time ; poor bird ! that only asked less love and more oblivion at the hands of the world, and bewailed its unhappy fate with fallen crest, drooping pinions, and joyless eyes.

Whichever way she looked, she saw nothing but small ignoble perplexities. At present Myra knew almost nothing of what Kitty's early life had been ; why should she ever have known but for these too fond, too faithful friends who would not be so kind as to forget her for a little while ? She should be sure to meet

Perry,—dear, disreputable Perry,—in the first picture-gallery they might chance to visit, and should have to choose between the painful alternative of cutting him dead, or bringing a dreadful scandal upon herself; or she should be slowly driving by Myra's side, or, worse still, with some of Myra's friends, perhaps with fastidious Sir George Bartelotte and his daughter along the Boulevard, and come upon the old vagabondish, darling, but terribly unwelcome crew, drinking beer and playing dominoes outside some fourth-rate café. Kitty's heart sank within her as she forestalled the catastrophe of such a meeting. Mrs Cornford would nod and put up her eye-glass to stare; Perry would look unmistakably aghast and forlorn; the children would turn scarlet with excitement, and gape and ejaculate, "There's Kitty! oh, goody, how smart she is!" How could she bear it? How could she flee from it?

She wondered how far it would be wise and safe to trust Myra; for trust her, in some degree, she must, or break with her. There was no other course left open that she could see.

So, when Myra came in, a little curious, a little vexed, and half inclined to be out of temper with Kitty for having friends of whom she knew nothing, the syren threw her arms about her more than sister, and said, plaintively—

"O Myra! nothing could have happened so unfortunately for me. The Normans have come to Paris."

"What, in Heaven's name, does that signify? Dr Norman knew your decision on a particular matter long ago."

Seeing Kitty's face cloud a little, she asked, point-blank—

"Isn't it so? If not, it was naughty behaviour on your part."

"I didn't lead him on to hope, and I didn't quite give him up. I can't bring myself to blurt out unpleasant truths—for the life of me, I can't. Don't blame me, Myra," poor Kitty pleaded; "it is my idiosyncrasy—not my fault."

"And it is my idiosyncrasy, not my fault, that I blurt out unpleasant truths always; and, pardon me, dearest, but though I love you, I can't trust you a bit—not a bit—if you have really acted towards Dr Norman thus."

Kitty was supreme at acting little tragedies, and here was a great occasion. In a moment she was at her friend's feet, a pale, dishevelled, penitent, distracted thing.

"Now, or never, you shall know all," she said, moistening Myra's hand with her tears; "and then you shall judge me according to my deserts. It is not only Dr Norman whom my affection for you has led me to deceive, but there are others—one, a man whom I half promised to marry years ago—when I was very young: and they all love me so much, and want me so much, that they have followed me here; and now I shall have no peace."

"Well," Myra said, after the manner of a child lecturing her doll, "of course, it's you who have done the wrong, and who must suffer for it. If I could bear some of the blame, I would."

"Oh! you don't know half the misery of it yet," poor Kitty groaned, still in her penitential attitude. "My oldest friends, those who brought me up, and to whom I owed everything when a child—though dear, generous, unselfish souls—are, or rather would seem to you, desperately vulgar—Heaven forgive me for saying so! I—I should be the most heartless wretch if I dreamed for a moment of giving them up; but I must choose between them and you."

And with that climax, she rose from her knees, and dashed to the window and back again, and stood by the mantelpiece, sobbing out—

"Between them and you—between them and you!"

"That is sheer nonsense," Myra said, with warmth. "Nothing shall induce me to give you up—till you marry; and I suppose you do not wish to marry this desperately vulgar lover who has followed you to Paris?" she said, archly.

"He is not vulgar, though I don't wish to marry him; it is of the others I speak."

"Oh! never mind the others. We can ask them to come one day by themselves, and show other innocuous civilities."

Kitty shook her head.

"We have been too intimate to come to that. Think for a

moment ! Can I just be civil to those who have been as good as father and mother to me ? I have told you, dear," and here her voice fell into a naturally subdued key, "what a fatherless, motherless, forlorn little gipsy I was,—and it was these people who took me in."

"Dear, dear," Myra said, "how I wish people would not be poor, and have children, and die : it bothers people's moral notions so. You can't cut your adopted fathers and mothers, and you can't be contented with being on mere friendly terms. And they are in Paris, and so are we. Dear, dear! what is to be done?—but don't cry, dear ; that is no sort of use."

Thus admonished, Kitty dried her eyes and grew calm.

"It is such a comfort to me that we really care for each other," she said, "and that you judge me kindly in everything. Without that assurance, life were not worth having."

And then she seated herself on a low stool at her friend's knee, and told a long story about herself, throwing such a halo of grace and pathos about it, that Myra quite envied the life at Paradise Place, and thought that Mrs Cornford, and Papa Peter, and Perry Neeve, must be much more interesting than people of her own set.

"Would it not be possible for you to see them now and then without any break between anybody ? They are so fond of you, that they would make any sacrifice, I should think," she said.

"Oh ! you don't know what jealousy is in such a set," Kitty exclaimed ; "well-bred people are not supposed to have any passions,—at least, they keep them within proper bounds. I tell you there is no help for it but to leave Paris."

"My poor Kitty ! Leave Paris, when Paris is the cream of existence ! Preposterous ! You stay—I stay—they stay—poor things !"

"Impossible !"

"You and I, then ?"

"Impossible !"

"But it seems worse than ridiculous that we should be driven from Paris, just because some people settle themselves here to whom you fancy yourself obligated."

"As if I should dream of letting *you* make such a sacrifice for me!" Kitty said, brimful of grateful affection;—"that is out of the question. At the same time, I cannot support the idea of all the thousand and one vexations too sure to follow from the arrival of these—my dear, kind old friends. Oh dear! if one had no natural affection, how easy life would be!" and she looked very pathetic.

"Which means that you would ignore the existence of your vulgar friends?"

"Not vulgar—unconventional, I should have said."

"Well, then, of your unconventional friends, and enjoy Paris to your heart's content? I can read you."

Kitty coloured, and was silent. Myra went on—

"But let us devise some means of cutting this Gordian knot. We will leave Paris as soon as possible, that is understood; meantime, do once and for all tell that cold, satirical Dr Norman, that you have given him up for ever and ever," and here Myra looked up with arch insinuation. "Perhaps it may be as well to say the same thing to the man you half promised to marry years and years ago."

"O, Myra!"

"You were more kind to him, were you, and sent him away sentenced and desponding, but not in suspense?"

Kitty now went on her knees afresh—we speak figuratively—kissing the ground, and sprinkling her head with ashes, crying, "Peccavi, peccavi!" and Myra, after an extravagant amount of childish scolding, coaxing, and caressing, left her in a comparatively happy mood. Myra consented, nay, proposed, that they should leave Paris in three weeks' time—a great concession—and Kitty felt that it would be possible to temporise with the Normans and the dear tiresome loving tribe from Paradise Place during that short space. She wanted to stave off a catastrophe till the eve of her departure with Myra from Paris, and then to go very meekly and penitently to the Faubourg St. Germain and the Rue de Trévise, and confess, as she had done to Myra, "Peccavi, peccavi!" and, having received plenary absolution from all, depart in peace.

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And all this while existence seemed a dreary isthmus to her, connecting the land of the past and the land of the future, across which she must walk alone. Strange, unaccountable human solitude, portion alike of the best and the worst, the meanest and the mightiest! Mothers have we, devoted to us; fathers who have toiled for us; brothers, sisters, friends; husbands whose light of the eyes we are, wives who cleave to us, children born of us, our very flesh and blood,—and yet who is not alone in his sorrow now and then? Do you suppose that the playful Horace any more than the serious Galileo, the saintly Washington any more than the sinful Phyrne, was exempt from this inevitable heritage? Our bright, brief glimpses of perfect happiness have been shared by those we would die for; but, God help us, each must go up to his Gethsemane alone!

To whom could Kitty lay bare her innocent heart? To none in the whole world; and sometimes, for she was without God in the world, the loneliness lay like a nightmare on her soul.

New ambitions were ever troubling her, as doubts trouble the inquiring, and she could no more have accounted for her uneasiness than they can. Why was she always courting to-morrow and slighting to-day, as if the one were a poor relation, of whom nothing could be expected, and the other a rich one, having legacies to bestow?

She had made her little voyages hitherto under rare auspices, coming home with a fair wind and a good freight; why could she not rest in the snug harbour wherein she had anchored? Why could she not think excellent things of the world good enough, but she must hunger and thirst, and stretch out her hands after the very best? Why? In the name of glory, Why?

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## CHAPTER XX.

*PERRY'S REVENGES.*

PERRY could not endure being unhappy. He regarded unhappiness as most people regard measles, or any other inconvenient disorder, and scolded it and reviled at it for coming upon him. What business had an unlucky fate to single him out, harmless, well meaning as he was, and so kindly disposed to all the universe, that he would let himself be pestered to death by rats, mice, black beetles, wasps, and other less bearable things, rather than end the most ephemeral existence on the face of the globe?

His was the sweetest temper by natural endowment; candid, ineffably artless, loving, unsuspicuous of evil, true ; but adverse fortune was to him as a sour-tempered nurse, and he and his nurse being at enmity, they buffeted and baited and worried each other to the utmost of their power.

Kitty had a thousand ambitions ; Perry had but one, and not seeing any prospect of that one being fulfilled, he chose to take his revenge.

And how ?

Of what use was it to paint well since Kitty scorned him ? Of what use was it to eat, drink, sleep, and read newspapers, since Kitty did not love him ? Of what use was it to keep good company, since he could not get into the best—namely, Kitty's ? Of what use was anything to him, good or bad ? Poor Perry set out as zealously on the road to ruin as Christian for the Celestial City of pure gold that stood upon a mighty hill, regarding those who tried to hinder him or hold him back as his greatest enemies. He could no more help combining colours harmoniously, or informing his most hasty sketches with passion and beauty, than he could help singing in tune, playing the lighter sort of music to perfection, or catching up snatches of any foreign tongue with delicious elocution. For your real genius is ever a Proteus, and Perry

was a real genius: gifted with a wonderful sense of beauty, and a capability for doing things no less wonderful.

You may be sure that Mrs Cornford did not spare the rod of correction from the back of her Benjamin of adopted children, when she saw him persisting in this desperate behaviour. She had no longer the slightest hope of Kitty, and was too honest, and too fond of Perry, to lead him on to false hopes concerning her; but she tried to inspire him with other more reasonable ambitions, and to make him see the clay foot of the golden idol he adored.

"It's more than silly, it's craven, it's unmanly," she would say, "to stake your bread in this world and your salvation in the next—for I'm sure the idle won't go to Heaven—on one die, and that die a woman! As if we were sent into this world like monkeys, to pounce upon the first nut we take a fancy to, and sit in the sun cracking it, and grinning and thinking ourselves wiser than King Solomon. I'm ashamed of you. I did think I could depend upon your acting like a man under misfortune—but men never do. The Lord only knows why such helpless things were created!"

Perry never grew angry, but would answer in a large sort of way, as if his trouble privileged him to say anything—

"O Polly! do leave a poor wretch in peace. You know nothing about us. You don't indeed."

"I like to hear you say that! If ever a woman knew anything about men, I do,—to my cost, too. There was my father, poor dear, a good-natured creature as ever breathed, but with no more sense or principle than you could lay on a baby's finger-nail. Didn't he run through my poor mother's little portion, and then betake himself to Australia, leaving us without a bed to lie on? There is my brother Tom. Didn't we women starve and slave, and all but steal, to give him a bit of education and make a gentleman of him? And what does my gentleman do when he has got a snug clerkship and four hundred a year, and has not a child in the world—and our sister dies leaving three orphans? Why, he just invites us all to dinner on Christmas-day, and sends the chicks his wife's

old clothes, and thinks he has done his duty ! And there was poor Cornford, bless him ! I don't wish to say a word against the dead, but what a time of it I had with him ! My dear Perry, don't say I know nothing about men."

"Oh ! of course, you know just what experience teaches you," Perry rejoined, sulkily ; "a woman can't go beyond that. I don't expect you to have any sympathy with what I suffer."

"Twiddle-dum-dee," Mrs Cornford said, with something like a tear in her eye. "If I didn't care for you, you might go downhill as fast as you like. But I want to rouse you to your duty."

"Good Heavens ! where did you learn to talk like that ?" "It's everybody's duty to be respectable," Mrs Cornford said, with vigour, "and it's nobody's duty to be an ass. Crying after Kitty is about as wise as crying for the moon, and crying because you can't get the moon of a piece with it," —she added, fiercely, "the life you pride yourself in leading now is a disgrace to the poor woman who bore you."

Perry turned exceedingly red.

"Yes, sir, a disgrace. You spend your time in smoking, and drinking, and bad company. You neglect your work ; you leave a good subject in such a mess that no one can tell which is the top and which is the bottom ; you disgust your best friends by debasing as delightful a genius as painter—I mean vagabond—was ever born with. A few months more of this sort of thing, and Perugino Neeve's name won't be worth a farthing dip among connoisseurs and picture buyers."

Perry, at this, dashed about the room like one mad.

"How can I work ?" he cried, "when my mind is full of her ? She may be false—as you say—or true. What has that to do with the matter ? If a man loves a woman, he goes on loving her, and there is no help for it ; and I shall go on loving Kitty, and there is no help for that either—except absinthe."

"You—don't—take—absinthe ?" faltered Mrs Cornford, with sudden pallor, adding : "if so, God save you, my poor Perry, for neither man nor woman can !"

"How you jump at conclusions!" Perry went on, still acting the lunatic to perfection. "Did I say that I drank absinthe, or that I was about to drink absinthe, or that I was about to be about drinking absinthe—pray did I or did I not, my good Polly? But women haven't so much as a grain of logic in their compositions, and it is of little use talking."

Mrs Cornford was not to be so put off.

"Dear Perry, good Perry," she said, laying her hands lovingly about his arms; "for the love of God, speak the truth. It is poison, you know, my dear, and I don't want to see you go down to your grave besotted with the worst dram-drinking that ever was; you haven't—you won't, Perry, on your word; you haven't—you won't," and then she broke down, and began to cry.

Perry, being unused to see women in tears, and Mrs Cornford's tears being wholly unprecedented, set to work to restore her after the most extravagant fashion. First and foremost, he darted to the door and called out, wildly—

"Tommie, Binnie, Mimi, make haste, my good girls! Your aunt is in a fit."

Then he rushed to and fro, overturning chairs, easels, and portfolios, in search of restoratives; and finally seized hold of a tin can, full of paint-water, and soused poor Mrs Cornford with it, ere she could defend herself. His act certainly attained its end, for Mrs Cornford's tears ceased to flow, but she was roused to such a pitch of indignation, that she could find no vent in words.

What followed can be better imagined than described. Perry, seeing himself worsted in the encounter, made an ignominious retreat from the studio, and absinthe was not again mentioned for some time.

But Mrs Cornford's anger was the thing of an hour, and when it had passed she was as keenly alive to the import of Perry's speech as ever.

She had known Perry since he was a curly-haired, marble-loving, apple-adoring little man of four years, and loved him with her whole heart. He had ever been what he now was,

beautiful enough for a god, impulsive as a woman, naïve as a child, gifted exceedingly, passionate, sensitive, versatile, weak. And she knew that nothing would ever change him—except absinthe. How could she save him, her adopted boy, her fellow-student, her critic, her friend, her darling? How could she save him from this great perdition?

Poor Polly Cornford was a bad hater, or she would have begun hating Kitty, though such a course were but to imitate the savages who buffet their unpropitious and faithless gods. From Kitty, she felt it was vain to hope anything. If Perry were saved, it must be by herself, unaided and alone.

In the weeks following, she watched Perry much as a cat watches a mouse; asking the why and the wherefore of any prolonged absence, searching his face with an eagerness at once fierce and pathetic, flying at him savagely when he made lame excuses for having come home in the small hours, coaxing him to his work as tenderly as a mother coaxes her sick baby to eat; exhausting all sisterly, womanly, motherly wiles on his behalf.

"Oh! of what use is it?" Perry would say. "Let me go my ways."

"That I never will, while my name is Polly Cornford, and I love chrome-yellow."

"But it's positively unchristian-like, and against the laws of society, to hunt a fellow down in the way you do."

"May I have no worse sins to repent of on my dying bed!"

And the two would squabble over the contested right—like two dogs over a bone.

Mrs Cornford resorted to other means, slyly persuading—the artful, loving, unselfish soul—one of her patrons to give Perry an order instead of herself. What were her own interests in comparison with those of her darling?

"Of what use is it?" Perry said again, with what would have appeared brutal ingratitude in anybody else. "Don't be so benevolent, Polly. You only get hated for it. I shall paint this picture in my worst manner, of course, and whose fault will it be? You have been warned."

What with Perry's dogged persistence in his vagabondish self-immolation, and irritable depreciation against interference, it was a wonder that Mrs Cornford's patience held out. But her patience seemed to possess the quality of miraculous replenishment, like the widow's cruise of oil.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### *KITTY FOLLOWS THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRODIGAL.*

ALL this time Kitty was saying to herself that if there were no passionate Perrys, and no patient Dr Normans in the world wanting to marry her, she could go her ways and be happy. She had passed the stages of early womanhood without being touched by the tenderness of a man—unless, perhaps, Perry's tenderness had touched her once or twice—and without desiring marriage for marriage sake.

But having in some inconsequent moment listened to the stories of two lovers, and never since having found courage to turn a deaf ear to either, she found herself now somewhat awkwardly entangled. In this, the Fates had been unkind to her, poor Kitty thought, for what would have comforted her so much as coldness or forgetfulness on the part of these men? One sword of Damocles hanging over one's head is a trial of fortitude, but two are unbearable; and Kitty fretted herself almost into a fever with the desire of getting away, not from her enemies, but from her friends. Meantime, how was she to temporise with them during the two or three weeks that remained of her stay in Paris? To ignore the fact that the Normans and Perry's set were in Paris was impossible, but any safe mode of recognition seemed hard to hit upon.

Should she write?

Should she go?

Should she ask them to visit her?

She decided upon the first expedient, and one or two sweet little notes of excuse found their way to the quiet old-fashioned

apartments in the Faubourg St Germain, and the dingy little hole in the Rue de Trévise.

These sweet little notes were works of art in their way, and cost Kitty as much thought and time as would have sufficed for results much more important. But they answered her purpose, and without affronting either, kept Dr Norman and Perry away. It chanced, curiously enough, that she never once encountered her lovers face to face during this probationary period. It is true that she religiously abstained from the picture-galleries, from the theatres, drove in the Bois less than usual, and sacrificed herself a dozen times a day. Dr Norman had called formally in the first instance, but she was not at home, not at home in the fact, and he had never repeated the visit.

Did Perry avoid her? and, if so, was it for the sake of his peace or her own? She felt inquisitive on this point, though she would not have confessed as much for worlds; and the more so as no answers had come to her sweet little notes to him, and Polly Cornford, and the Bianchis.

Myra, woman-like, tried to get at her dearest friend's real feelings on the subject of Perry, especially after having once caught a glimpse of him in the park of Vincennes. It had happened in this wise,—

Myra and Kitty were sweeping their long silk skirts across the dewy ways one summer morning, one or two friends bearing them company, when they came upon Perry, stretched at full length under a tree. He was bareheaded, and, as the weather was warm, had divested himself of paletot—like the careless vagabond he was—and with a little sunlight playing about his gold-brown locks and beard, and his ineffably winning face turned upwards, he looked beautiful enough to have Undines and Dryads for companions, in such a scene and such a time.

They would have passed him, but Myra felt her arm clutched as in a vice. "Come this way," Kitty said, calmly, though turning pale and red by turns. And they went the way she indicated, leaving Perry behind.

But Myra did not forget that glimpse of him, and would always be saying to Kitty such things as these—

"I don't believe there is another woman in the whole world, Kitty, who would have spent her youth with such a man, and him love her, and leave him and be happy."

Or,—

"Of course I know you are fond of me; as fond, I believe, as of any one in the world just now; but my turn will come to be forsaken like poor Mr Perugino."

Or, worse still,—

"I love you, Kitty, but I must say I think you have been heartless to that poor Perugino. Dr Norman I have no sympathy with; he is hard and dry, and, to my thinking, ugly; but I do wish we could contrive to make Mr Neeve happy. Would you like me to order a picture of him?"

But Kitty negatived the idea of the picture coldly, not seeing what good could result from bringing Myra and Perry together.

When not more than a week remained of their stay in Paris—the fact of their going was not to be told in Gath, nor proclaimed in Ascalon—she sent off the following promiscuous note addressed to Perry,—

"DEAR PERRY, DEAR POLLY, AND ALL YOU DEAR THINGS,—  
I have been so hindered in coming to you, so terribly hindered, that I thought I should never get a holiday at all; but I have an evening to myself at last—oh joy!—and, of course must spend it with you all. May I come to-morrow, at eight o'clock?

"Ever your runaway, repentant, affectionate (and, I know, forgiven!)  
"KITTY.

Then she wrote to her "good, kind friend," Dr Norman, saying how glad she was to hear that they were all well; how sorry she was not to be able to show them any hospitality, and begging permission to join their early dinner next day.

Of course both answers were *Come*; and the matter being

settled, Kitty felt more easy in her mind than she had done for weeks past. Having determined that the sacrifice was to take place, she should deck herself, a second Polyxena, very meekly with flowers, and yield herself up to the powers she had offended.

She provided a few propitiatory offerings—wonderful toys for Prissy, trinkets for the other ladies, a book for Dr Norman, and an original pen-and-ink sketch, by a well-known artist, for Perry, that she knew he would prize. She scribbled on the back of it, "For Perry, with Kitty's love;" and she wrote on the fly-leaf of Dr Norman's book, "Dr Norman, with the affectionate and grateful regards of K. S."—thinking thus to put her two gifts on a proper footing.

Then she prepared herself.

She longed—oh! how she longed—to wear her jewels, but good feeling, good sense, expediency prevailed, and she put on an innocent-looking grey silk frock, and tied up her hair with a black ribbon, wishing she possessed moral courage enough to make herself hideous by some means or other.

If she had followed out her first impulse, she would have gone in a stately gown of ruby velvet, that made her look and feel quite queenly. It was a work of art in itself, and she knew how Perry would go into artistic raptures over it, and how Dr Norman would smile with simple pleasure at seeing her look so beautiful. If there were two things under heaven for which Kitty would have sold her soul to Mephistopheles, these were velvet dresses and jewels; and it did seem hard that the friends she loved best in the world should never see her "arrayed in all her glory."

Why could they not love her in moderation, and be contented to have her among them now and then? Oh, weary, woeful waste of human love! she said to herself, and sighed—how easy life would be without it! Poor Kitty was a pagan as yet, unlearned in any kind of moral scripture, and she could not see what right human passion had to disturb the even balance of things.

When the temptations of ruby velvet, and pearl necklets,

and gold ear-rings were put aside, she grew more cheerful, and made her adieux to Myra with a smile.

"Now, do be firm for once in your life, and give everybody to understand that this is 'Miss Silver's last—positively last—appearance on the stage,'" Myra said. "It is so unreasonable and undignified to be dilatory in love affairs. If you really care—and I believe you do—for Mr Perugino, by all means marry him. I would never cast you off for being true to him; and I would help you both, and give him orders for pictures."

Myra sat in an easy chair, the very impersonation of pretty, petted, inconsequent, traditional womanhood,—womanhood asking no new privileges at the hand of progressive society.

Kitty looked down upon her from the height of her cold, brilliant, calculating intellect.

"You soft-hearted baby!" she said, toying with her hair; "what would the world be like if all women were Myras?"

"Like what it ought to be. Everybody should love somebody, and those who were rich should give half they had to those who were poor."

"As you do," Kitty said, with a pretty show of humility. "What a selfish wretch I am! How can I be something lower in the scale of creation than a barnacle, and not die of shame!"

"A—what?"

"An ignoble animal that fastens itself upon some other animal, and there sticks and grows fat!" Kitty cried, with fine disdain, adding, as she dropped at Myra's feet, "Spurn me from you as I deserve, and I should feel happier."

"How beautifully you act!" Myra said; "you know you care for me, and I suppose the barnacles have no particular affection for the creatures they stick to!"

"What a child you are!" cried Kitty, in an abandonment of rapture; adding, gravely, "but you will never understand me—never!"

"Oh! I never shall; and I suppose nobody ever did, for that matter," Myra said. "You are more of a riddle to me than ever, to-day."

"Why?"

"Because you have all along declared to me that Dr Norman and Mr Perugino are nothing to you, and yet I know that you will come home from these visits without having made them a bit wiser than they were."

"They won't take the truth from me, the intractable creatures," Kitty said, naïvely.

"Of course you must do as you like, but, you know, one cannot go on for ever shilly-shallying, either in small matters or great. Now go, you insinuating monkey, and get rid of all your lovers, and be home early. I shall be horribly dull."

Kitty went away leaving Myra in a reverie.

Myra worshipped her idol none the less for discovering that it had a clay foot. People took her for a very simple, unreflective little thing, but she had a subtle insight into character; and all the time that Kitty's will moulded her as clay is moulded in the hands of the potter, she was admiring the potter's ingenuity, and wondering what the next form would be.

When two women enter into a co-partnership of friendship—one furnishing brains, the other wealth, as their joint stock-in-trade—it is highly desirable that the sleeping partner should not look into the other's books.

Myra was the sleeping partner in this Friendship Unlimited Liability Company—of course we speak figuratively—and would unwisely glance over accounts sometimes. She did not always feel that she had made a safe investment. She mistrusted Kitty a little now and then.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### *THE FIRST FATTED CALF IS KILLED.*

IT was a very pale Polyxena who was led to the sacrificial altar. Kitty had set herself a harder task than she thought, and when the carriage stopped at the door of Dr Norman's



hotel, her heart was beating uneasily. All at once the old time at Shelley House came back to her; and what had happened since to make it so painful to recall? Nothing, of which she was not alone guilty; and she trembled at her own boldness in coming. Why, in Heaven's name, had she come? would it not have been better to appear cold and cruel at first than bring all this on us all? she thought; but it was too late to draw back now.

The hotel was one of those quiet old-fashioned places that English travellers rarely patronise; the suites of apartments were silent, sombre, and furnished after an aristocratic but somewhat shabby fashion; the waiters were unpolished, provincial-looking youths, who wore long brown-holland aprons with bibs; and the proprietress shelled all the green pease herself as she sat in her little office and carried on the business of the house.

At the merest finger-tap on the door, out flew Laura, all tears and kisses.

"Here she is, papa!" she cried; "she is really, really here!"

Then she dragged Kitty into an inner room, where Dr Norman sat reading the newspaper, with Prissy at his feet. The child had made a work-table of his knees, and stopped him from rising abruptly with a petulant—

"Papa, I *must* take off my doll's work first," and she would have removed every shred and reel by turns if he had let her.

But he brushed the gay bundle into her lap, and came forward holding out both hands to Kitty with a shy, eager, searching look.

Kitty hardly knew how to meet that gaze, but she made a great effort at self-control, and shook hands with him, looking up. They said a mere "How d'ye do?" then Prissy came up with her doll in her arm.

"Kiss me and kiss my doll," she said, very peremptorily, adding, "we have got such a grand dinner for you. I heard papa order it."

"But I didn't want a grand dinner, my child," Kitty interposed.

"Well, I told papa you didn't deserve it, because you were so long in coming," put in Prissy, archly. "When are you coming to stay altogether?"

"Prissy, it is not polite to ask such downright questions," said her father; "having got Miss Silver here, we must endeavour to make her visit pleasant."

There was something in Dr Norman's manner that troubled Kitty more than any demonstrativeness could have done; a studied deference, a studied kindness, a studied avoidance of painful things. Fool that I was to come! she kept saying to herself; a thousand times fool that I was to come! But having come, she could not get away. It was very dreary. The place was dreary to begin with; it had nothing of Parisian gaiety about it; the little courtyard boasted a few oleanders in pots, but no one came in or out, excepting the primitive-looking youths in their holland pinafores. From the front windows the scene was hardly more inspiriting; you saw a bookseller's shop and workmen in blue blouses, and workmen's wives in white caps passing by, and little else.

"Do you like being here?" asked Kitty of Laura, who sat beside her holding her hand.

"O! Laura is as happy as can be," answered Dr Norman; "she has picked up her old drawing-mistress, who takes her to galleries, and all sorts of interesting places."

"Mrs Cornford is here, you know"—said Laura, colouring painfully.

"What do you say, Kitty? is Mrs Cornford a proper chaperone for a young girl of Laura's age?"

"O papa!" cried Laura.

"Mrs Cornford is a most warm-hearted, excellent person, but not quite a lady," Kitty began, when dinner was announced, and Prissy persisted in hurrying them away.

"I do so want to see what there is," she said.

Poor Kitty felt more dismayed than ever as dish after dish came up, garnished with flowers, Prissy whispering at her elbow—

"There are plenty more coming."

They had killed the fatted calf for her, and were eating it joyfully for her sake, whilst all the time she was sick at heart and ready to cry. To simple people like the Normans, the fare made part of the welcome, so that there was no element but that of kindness in this way of treating her. Poor Kitty made a superhuman effort, and was gay. She had become apt in the art of talking lately, and could say smart things upon almost every topic without apparent effort—a great accomplishment in promiscuous society. She could talk of Bonapartism, of the Crédit Mobilier, of the Eastern question, and had a string of pleasant piquant bits of feminine gossip at her tongue's end. She could make a pun of pure water, and was superb at repartee. What, indeed, could she not do ?

Dr Norman listened and looked with a deeper love and a deeper fear growing up in his heart.

The conversation continued quite general throughout the dinner; and when it was over, Prissy brought out her doll's frock, begging Kitty to finish it. The child was the only person in the world who had patronised Kitty, and who, though in a measure fascinated by her, had never become her leal slave and admirer. But no one had ever made Prissy's doll look so beautiful as Kitty, and since she was there, and had been feasted, why should she not contribute to the general amusement? So Kitty was made to stitch and stitch bits of coloured ribbon, Dr Norman looking on.

"When are you coming here with all your boxes?" asked Miss Prissy, looking hard at Kitty. "To stay, I mean."

"I don't know," Kitty said. "Give me the scissors, please."

Prissy got up to fetch the scissors, and Laura forbore to look up. But Dr Norman saw the expression of trouble that Prissy's speech called into Kitty's face.

"We wish Kitty to do exactly what she likes best, don't we, Prissy?" he said, with forced cheerfulness.

"Which do you think you shall like best, to come or to stay away?" Prissy asked.

"Prissy, didn't papa say you were not to ask questions?" interposed Laura.

"Laura, you haven't got six dolls all wanting new frocks, or you'd be just as anxious as I am to know when Kitty is coming."

Just then the door opened, and one of the youths wearing bib aprons cried out—

"La voiture pour Mademoiselle."

Kitty's heart leaped. Was it possible that her time of probation had come to an end? She did not know how to feel grateful enough for Dr Norman's forbearing conduct, whilst it puzzled her sorely. They had been under the same roof for two hours, and he had made no effort to get a *tête-à-tête*. It seemed incredible.

But Kitty's momentary self-congratulation was soon at an end; for Dr Norman, with the quiet way in which he habitually did surprising things, said to the man—

"Renvoyez la voiture. Je vais conduire Mademoiselle à pieds."

When the door was shut, he turned to Kitty, smiling.

"I hope I have not done an unpardonable thing," he said, "but I should so like to have a little talk with you, and if you are tired we can still take a fiacre."

The thing was done after such a simple, straightforward fashion that Kitty felt dumbfounded. Had his manner savoured one iota of lover-like arrogance or lover-like sentimentality, she would have made an effort at resistance. But this slight exercise of power touched, whilst it paralysed her. She felt as she might have done had he been an aggrieved father.

She smiled a faint smile, and merely said that she thought they had better go at once. The children brought her bonnet and shawl, and dressed her after their naturally loving way. Then she kissed them, promised to see them again soon, told them to open the packet she had left upstairs, and descended with Dr Norman.

"You had better take my arm," he said, "or we shall never get on; the streets are so crowded."

"Yes, it is just the time when the poor are coming home

from work, and the rich are going out on pleasure," Kitty said. "What a pity it is that all the hard work of the world cannot be done by a superior race of animals, and not by men and women at all!"

"Then there would be no emulation, and that is wholesome food for a man's moral appetite."

"And no envy, which is more bitter than gall," pursued Kitty, eagerly, for she wanted to keep up the discussion. "I wholly agree with Mr Buckle's theory about poverty, Dr Norman."

"We will talk of Mr Buckle's theory by and by," Dr Norman said, very quietly; "I want to hear about yourself first."

"Oh! if you knew how I hate talking about myself. It makes me hate myself."

"We must talk of things we hate sometimes," persisted Dr Norman, "and it is best to get it over. Are you really in earnest when you promise the children to see them again soon?"

"Of course," said Kitty.

"And is your next visit to be a flying one also?"

"I hope not; but I am so little the mistress of my own time!"

"Are you really tied and bound?"

"How can it be otherwise; I have a good deal of strength and spirit to boast of, while Mrs Wingfield is almost a helpless person."

"Nay!" Dr Norman exclaimed, impatiently; "don't call her helpless when she is clever enough to keep any one like you about her. Call me helpless, if you like."

"But you are not a woman."

"Helplessness is not a question of sex, but of circumstances," he replied; "any man with a family of young children and no woman for his friend, is utterly helpless. Life—that is, the social part of it—becomes a chaos, and duty a maze."

Kitty was silent. What, indeed, could she say?

"What will become of my little girls growing into womanhood without a mother? What will become of my boys when

they go their own ways, and have no mother's love to make them ashamed of sin? If one goes astray through fault of mine, what will become of me? Once," he said, and his voice changed to a softer key, "once somebody said to me that it should not be so."

"And it shall not," Kitty interrupted, eagerly; "whatever happens, I will be your children's dearest friend. I have their hearts still, and I will keep them."

"Are you quite sure you have their hearts still?" Dr Norman said, bitterly. "You forget that it is months since you left us, and that Laura has been growing older meanwhile. O Kitty! it was a woeful day for me when you went away."

The pent-up storm had burst now, and there was no staying it.

Whilst he had kept to that aspect of her conduct which merely affected his children's welfare, she could listen calmly, for was she not receiving the just punishment of a broken contract? But when he touched upon their old relationship, as of man and woman loving each other, she would fain have rushed away.

"I could not tell what I should be led to do," she faltered, "and I am not happier for what I have done—indeed I am not."

"Then why not undo it? You must know, Kitty, that I ask you first to be my wife; and second, to be a mother to my children. I don't think there is any use in repeating that old story."

"I know too well that you love me," Kitty said, sighing, "and I am sorry."

"And I am sorry too," Dr Norman answered: "there is no one at all like you in the world, as far as I can discover, Kitty."

After a while he added, very sadly—

"And whom is it that you love better than me, then?"

Kitty turned an eager face to him.

"Before Heaven, none!" she whispered, hurriedly. "You

are the dearest friend I have in the world, but I am not the good woman you once thought me. I shrink from the responsibilities of being your wife."

She added, with some reluctance, "I have so meshed and entangled myself with other duties, that I do not feel free to choose for myself. Had I been born a rich woman, I could have loved you and been happy; but as it is, poverty makes me a slave, and I would rather serve a woman than a man."

"O Kitty! that is a cruel jest. What gifts in my hands would have been comparable to yours? It is in the nature of things that a woman is a benefactor always."

They walked on for some time in dreary silence, Kitty momentarily expecting the storm of reproach she felt to have so richly deserved. But it was not in Dr Norman's nature to reprove. If his children vexed or disobeyed him, he said so plainly, and there the matter ended. Kitty had hit him harder than she knew, and he was trying to tell her so in just and temperate words.

"I think," he said, "it will be wiser and kinder of you not to come among us again yet. At forty-five one does not cry away one's troubles as boys and girls do, and you are not the sort of woman any man would love by halves"—

"If only"—Kitty began, falteringly.

"Why are you such a coward? There are no *ifs* in the case that I can see. You never cared for me, and that is the Alpha and Omega of it; therefore let us shake hands and say Good-bye, and God-speed to each other."

Kitty could not bear the quiet desolation of his manner. Who so good, so kind, so worthy of affection as he?—and how had she repaid him for his goodness, and kindness, and affection? A tide of remorse and enthusiastic feeling filled her heart. She put her left hand on his arm, half smiling and half crying.

"If your prodigal ever comes back to you, will you take her in? There is nothing enduring in life but such a love as yours."

"Seven times and twice seven times I will take her in," he

answered ; and lifting the hand that lay on his arm, sealed his words with a shy kiss.

Kitty had never looked handsomer than she did now, with that fine passion of pity flushing her cheeks and softening her eyes ; and Dr Norman felt it some compensation to be so pitied. But what a short-lived one ! They were already near the Rue de Trévise, and he knew that when he should have left her at her friend's door, all would be over between them,—all friendship, all sympathy, all the sweet observances born of love.

They shook hands silently ; then went their own ways without looking back.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *THE SECOND FATTED CALF IS KILLED.*

KILLING the fatted calf is doubtless pleasant entertainment enough to everybody concerned—except the calf, and the Prodigal. Whose heart does not glow, whose face does not shine, when he is called upon to say grace over such a feast ? Ineffable moment ! We have been wise all along, and can afford to relish the baked meats, and the text, and the application, whilst the foolish Prodigal sits by, head bent down, with little appetite for either. How could the Prodigal come back, I wonder ?

The hotel in the Rue de Trévise was one of those large dingy houses that are divided into dozens of small rooms let to poor students, milliners, mechanics, and occasionally to English travellers—artists for the most part—who, like Mrs Cornford and her party, catered for themselves. Kitty was told by the porteress to find *numero 64, au cinquième*, and she toiled up the dusky, dingy staircase, holding her lace-bordered handkerchief to her nostrils. She had been so accustomed to attar of roses and other fragrances of late, that the smoky, garlicky air of the place seemed to stifle her. How could any one live in such a den ? she thought, and she pitied herself for her former insensibility to refinement, more and more.

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She stood still a moment or two before summoning courage to ring the bell. She knew that she must not here expect the reticence and the mercifulness she had received at the hands of Dr Norman, and the skin of her conscience had grown more tender since she last lived among true-hearted, rough-mannered people like Mrs Cornford. But she said to herself—I will be meek and amiable ; I will bear patiently whatever may be said ; if they act like lions, I will play the lamb : and with this determination she rang the bell.

“Bless me !” she heard Mrs Cornford cry within. “There’s our fine lady. Run, Tommie (as Miss Thomasine was always called), and open the door. I can’t leave the gridiron.”

“O aunty ! I’m peeling onions,” answered Tommie.

“Well then, you go, Mimi.”

“O aunty !” cried Mimi, poor Polly Cornford’s second darling, “I’m blacking Perry’s boots, and am as black as a sweep.”

“Send Binnie, then.”

“Oh !” Miss Binnie answers, “how you talk, aunty. Don’t you know you just gave me the jam-pot to scrape ? I’m as sticky as a treacle-tub.”

“Oh, bother ! You children are always full of excuses,” Mrs Cornford said. “Then I’ll go myself, though I’m in a worse pickle than any one of you.”

And with that she opened the door, gridiron in hand.

“So you’re really come, miladi ; that’s an unexpected pleasure, as the spider said to the fly. I know you look upon us as the dirtiest, degradedest set in the world. But come in, my dear, and lend us a helping hand with the supper.”

The three girls now came up and embraced Kitty, and hung about her, loving and slatternly and loquacious.

“Perry is in his room, higher up, putting on his best clothes, and aunty told him he was a fool for his pains,” began Tommie.

“And the Bianchis are coming, and Monsieur Puig (we call him Piggy behind the scenes), who is engaged to Vittoria

Bianchi, and who writes such beautiful stories for *Le Petit Journal*," added Mimi.

"And aunty says you're not to go home till daylight, till daylight doth appear," said Binnie, the youngest of the three girls, a sprite of ten, "and that when you are gone, Perry will kill himself with charcoal. Will you let him?"

"Let me take off my bonnet and shawl, and then I will answer your questions," Kitty said.

"My stars! what a bonnet!" said Mrs Cornford, looking over her shoulder from the gridiron, "if you take my advice, Kitty, you'll keep it on, for there isn't any room for it here, small as it is. You see we have to turn the studio into a kitchen, and the parlour into a drawing-room, when we have grand visitors, like you."

"Shall I carry it up into Perry's studio?" asked Mimi.

"Well, on the tip of the toasting-fork, then, for your hands are not clean enough to touch it," said Mrs Cornford; but Kitty suggested that the lay-figure was quite as convenient, and there the matter ended.

"Anyhow, you might as well run and tell Perry that Kitty is here, for they could be having a little talk in the drawing-room together, before the people come," Mrs Cornford added; and Kitty had much ado to hinder the messenger from being sent.

"There is so much to do, and he'd only be in the way," she said, beginning to dust and brush, and pretend to be busy.

Mrs Cornford and the children kept up a ceaseless talk, part banter, part catechism, but poor Kitty was thinking all the while of Perry. What would he say to her? How would he greet her? It had been painful enough to receive Dr Norman's quiet stabs, but he was so merciful, so careful not to repeat the wound, that she felt she could bear almost as much again. From Perry, who was young, and had moreover all the fire and impatience of genius, what might she not expect? Kitty had no idea of religion, as we have said, but even the children of Mammon are conscious at times that life and the handling of it are solemn things. Kitty handled her life as best pleased her,



and was only troubled with tremblings now and then. There was one power to which she bowed a submissive neck, the power of Anger, just whose parent is Love. Whose love might so engender anger as Perry's? and he had all his life before him! It was his youth that troubled her like a bad dream—his gifted, beautiful youth, that might otherwise have been happy.

By and by, there was a loud ring at the bell.

"Perry, I'll be bound!" cried Mrs Cornford. "It's only young harum-scarums, like your lover—O Kitty! you needn't look alarmed—who ring bells in that way? Kitty, my good girl, do open the door."

Kitty, obeying mechanically, let Perry in.

He looked much the same Perry as ever—a little paler, a little thinner, perhaps, but no less youthful, and no less winning. What eyes, what a mouth, what locks were his! There was no other man in all the world at all like him, Kitty felt, yet she could not find it in her heart to give up the game of life, and live in his love.

He crimsoned to the roots of his hair, then turned very white, and had never a word to say: Kitty's tongue also clave to the roof of her mouth. At last, for the little girls were all looking on, round-eyed and full of curiosity, he stammered—

"O Kitty! we are going to be so gay to-night! I have learned a new song to sing since last we feasted together."

"Sing it now, do!" cried little Binnie.

"Supper first, and songs afterwards," Perry said, still reckless, and speaking with artificial gaiety. "Suppose, Kitty, you and I lay the cloth as we used to do? One can't so well be idle and merry."

The second little room, dignified by the name of a salon, opened out of the first, and here the fatted calf was to be served. The children ran hither and thither, fetching knives, forks, and napkins, whilst Perry and Kitty arranged the table. Perry had truly said, one can't be idle and merry. Kitty felt that if she were left to herself for a single minute, she should cry.

"How natural it all seems," he said ; "but you have forgotten how to fold the napkins in the true *Chapeau de Bonaparte* style. I suppose your funkeys do it now."

"Oh ! let us forget the funkeys," began Kitty.

"Very well, for the time being we will pretend, as children say, that everything is just as it was. We're in Paradise Place ; you're Kitty and I'm Perry again, and we're going to be married some day. My dear, mind what you are about ; you are spilling the salt in a most reckless manner."

Her hands were shaking so that she could hardly hold anything, and he saw it. He grew gayer and gayer.

"I'm really painting good things now," he went on. "I have, in fact, turned the corner, and don't think I shall ever be compelled to mortgage my dress-suit and Sunday hat again. Isn't that a wonderful improvement in my circumstances ? And just look here."

He drew out of his pocket a little bundle of notes for twenty, forty, and a hundred francs.

"Take care of them for me, Kitty. That was our bargain, you know ; I was to earn the money, and you were to spend it."

"My pocket is not very safe," hesitated Kitty.

"Nonsense, we are only in play," he said, and put them in his pocket. "Well, I've more good news to tell you ; I no longer go about in the world labelled 'SOLD TO A DEALER,' but am free to carry my sacks of corn to whatever market I like ; and though markets are down, I can make my price."

"I am so glad !"

"Oh, it's jolly ! I may well sing songs ; you remember the tide-mark you set up last year : we shall soon reach it, and then, why then, what Darby or Joan will there be left in the world to envy ? I think we agreed that we could live in harmony on six hundred a year ?"

"I think we did," answered Kitty, feeling cold and sick.

"Good ! I am at work on a picture, a commission, that will bring me two-thirds of that sum ; a couple of pot-boilers, turned off in a fortnight, will make it up—and what can you say, what can you say, Kitty ?"

"Nothing," faltered Kitty.

"Of course not; but will set to work on your wedding clothes, like the sweet girl you are. See! I have already bought the wedding-ring." And he really drew from his waistcoat pocket a wedding-ring.

"Try it on," he added.

Kitty made a faint resistance, but in vain, and was constrained to try on the wedding-ring. All her powers of self-composure and self-mastery seemed to have forsaken her. She tried again and again to rally them, but failed. The ghastly game must be played out at Perry's will.

"It fits exactly; so that point is settled," he continued. "And now we come to another equally so. Don't you think the twenty-fifth of June is auspicious for a wedding-day?"

"You are too absurd," Kitty faltered.

"We are only in play, and it does not matter being absurd. Will the twenty-fifth of June do, Kitty? We are in the first days of May, so it is not hurrying you much; and," he added, with a look of love and wistfulness not to be put into any words, "I am so tired of waiting."

Kitty had her back turned upon the busy little party in the kitchen, and standing thus, covered her eyes with her hands, and groaned inwardly. Did she indeed love Perry a little then? Was she touched by the way in which he sported with his sorrow, making it all the more apparent? Would she fain have undone the work of her hands—pulled up the fatal harvests of her sowing?

She could not have answered these questions. He was unhappy; his unhappiness spoiled the flavour of her existence; she wanted him to leave her, and become happy somehow. That was all.

The secret, stealthy groan relieved her. She felt better able to comfort his eerie mood.

"And so am I tired of waiting," she said.

He turned upon her suddenly, cold as ice.

"For me?" he asked.

"No; for no human being—for rest; for rest as perfect as one gets in the grave. 'Life is like a fair, and there are too many things we want to buy with our little stock of money! I may lay mine out foolishly, but I suppose so does everybody."

"You don't lay yours out half so foolishly as I do," Perry said, bitterly. Then he fell back into his ghastly mood; and, whilst decking the table with flowers, laughed, talked, and sang after such frantic fashion, that a stranger coming in must have taken him for a runaway Bedlamite.

"Why, it's not a year since we died and were buried, and now we are all brought to life again. How jolly!" he cried. "I died soon after that farewell feast to you, Kitty, in Paradise Place; when did you die? Here we are, all safe and sound again, so don't look glum, except that we have left something behind us. Have I really a head on my shoulders, Kitty—have I? Don't laugh, Mademoiselle Mimi, people have done more comical things than lay a cloth without having heads on their shoulders before. I'll sing you a song of Heine's, to prove my assertion true. It is about Marie Antoinette and her maids of honour, long after they were guillotined (here a snatch of the ballad); there is to be a levée, you know (here another snatch), and they are dressing the queen now (here another snatch). Oh, it's so queer! They put on her majesty's clothes all right: of course they don't friz her, because she's no head, poor thing! as Heine says—

'Das sind die Folgen der Revolution  
Und ihre fatale Doctrine.  
An Allem ist schuld Jean Jaques Rousseau,  
Voltaire und die Guillotine.'

And the sun was so scared when he peeped into the Tuileries' windows, that he went to bed for the rest of the day. That's my glorious Heine all over. Now doesn't the theme apply to ourselves? Here we are, all assembled to make merry, but I'm sure, for my part, I would ten times rather have stayed in my grave where I was—I mean where I should like to be"—

"Perry!" put in Kitty, quite shocked.

"My liege lady and mistress, I listen and obey. Have I not always obeyed you? You told me to work hard and save money; have I not done it? Ask my worthy friend Mrs Cornford; ask the ghost of my mother's grandfather; ask the shades of my immortal namesake, Pietro Vanucci Perugino."

To Kitty's great relief she heard the bell ring. It was Monsieur Puig who entered the room, hat in hand, got up as to externals in a way that did credit to *Le Petit Journal*. It is quite wonderful what a Bohemian can make of himself in Protean Paris. He can write, palimpsest-wise, the shibboleth of respectable society over the veriest rag-tag-and-bob-tail substratum. He can be gloved, perfumed, and Puritanic on the shortest notice. He can swear by Paul de Kock, and all the Bohemian powers that be, one moment, and the next affect the profoundest adoration of Emile Souvestre and the author of "The Heir of Redclyffe." Monsieur Puig, having engaged himself to an English demoiselle, felt bound to be unexceptionable in her society; and he was so often in her society, that he was insensibly casting his Bohemian skin. Upon this occasion, when Perry formally introduced Kitty as his fiancée—whispering to Kitty, "It is only in jest, you know"—he fell straightway head over ears in love with the tall, handsome, piquant-looking girl in Quakerish grey silk, wishing he had two selves to give away; it seemed too little happiness to marry and become respectable but once in one's life!

"I suppose Vittoria will make her appearance by and by," said Mrs Cornford, bluntly; "but it is hard work for photographers to clean themselves."

"But how lovely is that stain of chloride of silver upon her dear little fingers!" cried Monsieur Puig, rapturously. "It's like the henna with which Moorish ladies love to adorn themselves. *Ah! la voilà, mon ange!*" and he sprang forward to greet his betrothed.

The photographers were angular, plaintive-looking little women, with large bright eyes, sallow complexions, small features, and sweet voices. They were both gifted with genius

—a puzzling, half proud, half painful gift to women—and were more wise than merry, and more critical than coquettish.

Who can for an instant aver that genius unsexes a woman? None who know what genius and women really are. Vittoria Bianchi, with a very little more education, could have taught the world aesthetics, either by work or writing. Because she possessed a superabundance of intellect, and a hunger and thirst after knowledge, did she blush and tremble the less when her lover's looks praised her? Not she. He was a very ordinary man indeed; but he loved her, and that was enough. Is not a man's love enough for any woman?

Two or three other men arrived; one an artist, another an author, a third a violinist; all three shabby, sociable, delightfully sympathetic creatures, who had been reserving alike appetite and powers of entertainment for the occasion.

Supper being announced by one of Mrs Cornford's models, who had come in to assist, the little party sat down.

Kitty fell into a trance. She heard Perry's voice at her elbow calling her by well-remembered names; she saw the old familiar faces around her; she was called back to the old familiar life by every word and jest and smile. It was all very strange, and she longed to break the spell and breathe freely again.

Perry was mirthful as a harlequin, and pale as a ghost.

"You don't eat, you don't drink, Kitty," he kept saying to her; "and you are grave as a judge. Can't you make merry with us for a little while?"

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *THE FEAST ENDS.*

"AND now for Perry's picture," said Mrs Cornford, when the merry feast had sped to its close. "I'm sorry you have made such a poor supper, Kitty, but I expected as much.

Well, I hope fine clothes and spiced dishes will always agree with you. That's all, my dear."

Perry gave her his arm, and they led the way. It was a very dirty staircase they had to ascend, and a very dingy studio at the top. Perry led Kitty to a solitary chair which stood in front of his picture.

For some minutes there was a complimentary silence. Then Kitty struck a key-note of criticism, Vittoria followed her example, and a succession of chords were played by the others. No one praised Perry's work after wholesale amateur fashion, but each criticised it in a vivacious, technical, picturesque way peculiar to themselves.

"Do you like the picture?" asked Perry of Kitty, who, for a moment, was absorbed in the act of criticism.

"You know I never quite like your pictures; so, what is the use of asking?" she said, smiling a little impatiently. "I admire them wonderfully, but they don't please me. They are such strange subjects for a meek thing like you to paint," and she laughed, forgetting everything in the pleasure of teasing Perry.

Her frank, familiar manner intoxicated him. He went on to ask—

"Shall I throw up this bit of foreground? Shall I deepen the shadows here, or whiten the lights there?" and a dozen questions, she answering each deliberately. Then he took up his palette and dashed in a little colour whilst she was speaking; and so absorbed were both in the work, that they were left alone ere they were aware.

"It will be quite your best picture," Kitty said, after a time; "but I think I must go now. The carriage—I was to be sent for at eleven o'clock."

The enchantment was over like a dream. Perry's brush dropped from his hand, and he turned to her, quite speechless with the new full conviction of his misery.

"You said once that you would marry me as soon as I was better off," he began, falteringly.

"O Perry! what boys and girls do not make such promises? Forgive me for having made any to you!"

"Can you forgive me for being so unhappy now?" he said. "Doesn't the thought of it prevent your enjoyment sometimes? I don't think I should enjoy purple and fine linen much if I knew you to be starved and shivering."

"You reproach me as if I were happy," Kitty said, passionately.

He looked at her searchingly and savagely.

"You women prevaricate so," he said; "you can never summon courage to blurt out an ugly truth. If you are happy, it would be better to confess it!"—and he went on to say much more.

Kitty rocked herself to and fro in her chair, listening to his reproaches very meekly. She would have consoled him by tender expressions of friendship, but he stopped her with almost brutal abruptness. What mattered it to him whether she was glad or sorry, so long as they were to part for life? That was the only thing worth considering, and she did not seem to consider it at all, which proved her to be utterly insensible to his feelings. Every now and then she broke the thread of his angry words with a deprecatory word or gesture; once, she laid her hand on his arm,—he rejected the caress as he had done the words, and stood aloof from her.

Kitty felt turning cold as stone. Dr Norman's calm reproaches had made her sorrowful and ashamed, but Perry's anger revealed to her fearful things. She felt that she had been wicked to him, and though she had blamed herself before, this sort of self-condemnation was new. She saw, as it were, the mustard seed of her own unfaithfulness grow up into a tree before her eyes. She could almost have undone it all.

She began a Litany, having for its burden—"O Perry, have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner!" But he would have no mercy on her. He was young; and youth is just, insisting on an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, always. She had robbed him of the sweetest thing in life—of peace. He might find everything else he wanted—money, fame, friends—but he knew that he should never find peace any more, and he was in duty bound to punish her.

Who could blame him ? Who could wonder at him ? He painted a terrible picture of himself, and made her look at it.

"You are young, you will care for somebody else," she ventured to say ; whereupon he smiled in a wild sort of way, caught her hand to his heart for a second, and then asked if they had better not go down—adding, "For I think I have grown a little mad of late, dearest, and don't wish to frighten you."

The child-like abandonment of his manner, coming, as it did, after such a storm of invective, took Kitty entirely by surprise. She felt so sorely tempted to comfort him for the time. She looked up, her handsome eyes brimming over with pity, and said, beseechingly—

"Dear, dear, dearest Perry, if I cannot marry you, I will marry no one else ; if I cannot love you, I love no one else. Let that comfort you."

It did not comfort him, but such words were sweet to hear, and for the sake of hearing one or two more, he lingered and lingered. At last, Binnie's voice was heard on the threshold,

"A carriage—such a grand carriage for Kitty !" and at that sound Perry grew fierce and frigid again. They descended in silence.

"Well, if you never condescend to cross this threshold any more, here's my love, and good luck to you, Kitty !" said Mrs Cornford. "I hate your ways, but for the life of me I can't help liking you."

Kitty smiled, and embraced her warmly.

"O Polly ! how you try to put me out of temper ! But I never am out of temper, you know, and so I shall kiss you and come again."

"Yes, that's the way of you worldly-minded people, you always kiss and come again. Kitty, I've no hope of you."

Kitty turned round to the little circle, giving a hand and a cordial word to each, and keeping a pitiful, penitent, sideways look for Perry always.

"Good-bye, dearest Vittoria. I will not forget to send you that new volume of art criticism we talked of. Good-bye, M.

Puig. I am enchanted to have met the author of ‘Les Derniers Amours.’ Adieu, Tommie and Mimi : adieu, dear Binnie ; you shall get your promised doll in a day or two ;” and then Perry wrapped her in her rich velvet cloak and led her down-stairs.

They talked of ordinary things quite calmly. Had she seen Emile Augier’s new play ? Had she read Sand’s last novel, and whom was the heroine going to marry ? Did Kitty ever go into the studios ? Did Perry ever hear the lectures at the Collège de France ? And so on.

Then he put her into the carriage, carefully but coldly.

“Are you well wrapped up ? the night is chilly,” he said.

“Quite well, thank you.”

“Then I may tell the man to drive on.”

“Please.”

“A la maison,” he said, in a loud voice, to the coachman, who shifted the reins and elevated his shoulders preparatorily. The horses had just begun to move, when Perry thrust his head in the carriage.

“Be merry, Kitty, after your own way,” he said ; “we can’t help loving you better than anything else in the world, but we won’t disturb your peace much.”

There was a lamp close by, and she saw that whilst he spoke his cheeks were moistened with tears. The concentrated expression of pain in his face and voice was more than Kitty could bear.

“Arrêtez !” she called to the man, and the horses were checked for a moment. She lowered her voice, and said—

“Do not be unhappy, dear Perry ; I will still try to be true to you yet. I will, indeed.”

“Take your oath upon it,” he said.

“I take my oath upon it. I will try to be true to you.”

“My sweet !” he said, passionately, and leaned forward ; their faces just touched for a second, then he moved back quietly, and the horses sprang forward, bearing her to her luxurious home and secret thoughts.

The worst of life is that it has secrets. What is not easy to bear in comparison with some miserable secret that concerns

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ourselves only? Thus thought Kitty as she leaned back on the soft cushions and enjoyed them. If she could only rid herself of the unspeakable responsibility of her own individual *ego*, she felt that life would not be hard. Being herself, she could but be true to herself, and this was to be false to others. She would have given worlds to confess, do penance, and go her ways clean and scot-free again; but not being a Romanist, she was fain to carry her sins about her, like Christian in Bunyan's story, only, unlike Christian, she would let nobody know what was in her bundle. She leaned back on the soft cushions and enjoyed them, despite the something that pricked her now and then. She tried to console herself with thinking that there were, doubtless, numbers of women whom characters and circumstances had forced into much the same groove. Goethe says, "The history of a man is his character;" and so thought Kitty Silver. It was the text on which she preached little sermons to herself every day of her life: and whether they did good to her or no, she said Amen to them and felt better.

But somehow to-night she preached and said Amen, and felt just as uneasy as before. The thought of Perry's unhappiness, of Dr Norman's unhappiness, disturbed her more and more. She had virtually taken leave of them; but what was such virtual leave-taking? Her weakness of disposition would be sure to lead her into assignations, and assignations could hardly be harmless things. She had been on the verge of committing herself into sentimental follies a dozen times that evening; she should not have better armour another time.

"Fool that I was; fool that I am; fool that I shall be!" she said to herself again and again, conjugating the agglutinised verb in all its tenses. But there must come an end alike to folly and delusion sooner or later, and she eagerly asked herself, "When, and how?"

When and how—how and when? Here Kitty's deliberations came to a stand-still. She would fain have divided her single self into three; giving one to Perry—the high-spirited, devoted, despairing Perry; one to Dr Norman—the truest friend, the

manliest lover, woman ever had ; and keeping the third for the world she loved so well.

"Ah me !" she thought, "that women ever find time to be gay and pretty is a marvel, seeing how they have to think, and think, and think ! Somebody has said, 'Men must work, and women must weep ;' but weeping is not the hardest part of it. I would rather cry for grief than have to choose between two things, pleasant and painful, any day. Does the arrangement of one's life trouble everybody as much as it does poor unhappy me ?"

And she pitied herself, then Perry, then Dr Norman, till at last she fairly cried, and wished that nothing was as it was.

If she could only forget them ; if they would only forget her, how much better it would be ! She felt that she had only drawn the net closer round her by these meetings. Dr Norman might fairly expect his prodigal back, some time or other ; and had she not openly pledged herself to love and marry Perry, if she ever married at all ?

She dried her tears as the carriage drew near home, and met Myra on the landing with a beaming face. Myra was in dressing-gown and slippers, anxious for a long and entertaining story.

"Well !" she said ; "has it been pleasant among the Bohemians ? I have been dreadfully bored at the Bartelottes' dinner. There was no one who could make other people talk, and nobody did anything ;" and Myra yawned, adding, "Were you very merry ?"

"Yes, we were very merry."

"And have you said good-bye all round ?"

"Oh ! did I say that I was going to do that ?"

"What good have you gained by going, then ? None that I can see."

Kitty was silent.

"What good have you gained ?" repeated Myra.

"A little, I think. At any rate, I have done a right and kind thing in going to see my oldest friends."

If Myra was in an amiable mood whenever Kitty moralised, she merely yawned and let her do it, feeling that they were made better somehow. To-night she was in an amiable mood, and accordingly Kitty had her say about one's duty to the world in general, and to one's lovers in particular. When she had done Myra began—

"Now tell me what the people said ; we were so dull that I had a great mind to come to you."

Everybody had said good things over the queer little supper in the Rue de Trévisé, and Kitty had the art of making good things sound better ; *bon-mots* of very faint quality came out from her mint bright and clear as new sovereigns. She had the great art of always keeping the roundness of a story unbroken—not diverging to the right or to the left, but minding that every segment should be true to its radius. She found that people always listen eagerly if they are only required to listen for a little while.

Kitty almost forgot her sorrows as she laughed with Myra over Perry's puns, Vittoria's repartee, and Monsieur Puig's stories.

"I wish we could be witty and gay and respectable too," she sighed, on a sudden. "I think we should live all the longer for having a good hearty laugh now and then."

That night Kitty's sleep was troubled with dreams. She was being married in church to a dozen people against her will ; she was locked up in Perry's studio and could not get out ; she was on the tower of St Jacques de la Boucherie with Dr Norman, with Perry, and with poor forgotten Regy, her boy-lover ; and they pushed her over and she went on falling, falling, falling, and when she had done falling she was in the Seine, and there was Mrs Cornford paddling about, who shouted out, "The emperor is drowned—we are all searching for his body !" And Kitty paddled, and Dr Norman, and Perry, and Regy—who came there in some unexplained manner, and paddled too ; but instead of the emperor's body they found Papa Peter, who had got on a dress-suit of shining cloth, and danced on the roof of the floating baths to the tune of "Where are you going, my pretty maid ?"

## CHAPTER XXV.

*A THUNDERBOLT FALLS.*

OF course Perry and Dr Norman were in a seventh heaven for a time. Had not Kitty—this ever new, sweet, wonderful goddess of theirs—wept for them, said tender things to them, held out far but not wholly impossible visions of Paradise before their longing eyes? Was she not, though led astray by her passion for the world, still their own loving Kitty, the one woman, to their thinking, the most beautiful of any, and as near perfection as daughters of Eve can be? So each lover began to hope again, with a zest that would have been laughable, had it not been pathetic.

Dr Norman pondered and pondered as to the best means of altering his mode of life, so as to suit it to Kitty's tastes. She craved for a many-coloured, many-phased existence, which at Shelley House he could not give her. If she came back to him —how his honest heart leaped at the bare idea!—he resolved to sacrifice many things in order to make her happy. He would lift himself out of the scholar and the student, and for her sake become a citizen and a man of the world. He would think nothing puerile that she loved, nothing unnecessary that she longed for. If she willed it, they would let Shelley House, and travel for a year or two, leaving the boys at school, and taking Laura and Prissy with them. She had often expressed a wish to see Italy and the East, and what more feasible than such a tour?

Then there were means of making their home life more varied. London was only an hour and a half removed from them by rail; and why should they not spend a little time in London every year, entering moderately into such gaieties as Kitty loved? The old house should be made brighter and blither; Kitty should find in himself a companion and a friend, for under such sweet influence he felt sure of growing younger, and therefore more worthy of the woman he worshipped.

And what were Perry's dreams? Curiously enough, the

tables had turned, and, whilst the pre-eminently practical and sober-minded Dr Norman was dreaming from morning till night, Perry, the dreamer, the votarist of enthusiasm, the idealist, was solely occupying himself with one great question—which was MONEY.

For the few days following Kitty's visit, he worked at his easel as if for dear life. One or two small pictures were finished and sold, and the large picture was dealt with carefully and religiously; was it not to buy the most sacred thing in the world to him—Kitty's love?

He became, for the time being, a miser, a teetotaller, an ascetic; adjuring cigarettes, absinthe, theatres, and anything that cost time or money. He worked in his ill-ventilated studio till he almost dropped down of exhaustion. He denied himself proper rest; forgot when the meal-times came round; forgot everything in the world—but Kitty.

When Polly Cornford remonstrated, he either flew at her like a raving lunatic, or doggedly defended himself with such arguments as these—

"I must win Kitty somehow, and there is no other way. I shall soon have a thousand pounds; that will be enough to furnish a house and start with; and if she won't listen to me then, she never will."

"She never will, to my thinking. You're in a fever, my poor Perry, and the sooner you try to cure yourself the better will it be for you. Look facts in the face, like a man."

"Do leave me in peace," groaned Perry.

Mrs Cornford, whose kind heart was sorely troubled about her darling son by adoption, finding that nothing was to be done for his mind, was fain to keep his body from starving. So she wheedled him into taking cups of broth or chocolate, and bore his ill-humour as patiently as mothers bear with their sick children.

And Perry painted on, believing in Kitty, and hating all the world because it doubted her.

But one day the unnaturally brilliant atmosphere which Dr Norman and Perry were breathing, was disturbed by a thunder-

bolt falling at their feet. Kitty had left Paris, and was gone, they knew not whither!

The thunderbolt had come wrapped in rose leaves, but it was stunning nevertheless. Kitty broke the information of her departure from Paris,—departure for an unlimited time,—departure made without any reference to her lovers,—in the most tender way. It seemed impossible that a little note, scented, worded like a poem, sealed with rose-coloured wax, should mean heartless treachery; and yet, if not that, what was Kitty's meaning?

The worst of it was, that she gave no address. "I hardly know what my kind friends' plans are yet," she wrote to Dr Norman, "so that we can only write for letters when we make a halt. They talk of the Pyrenees, of Switzerland, even of the baths of the Austrian Tyrol, but, as yet, without any definite plans. Pray do not judge me harshly for leaving Paris without a word of farewell: but if you knew what those farewells cost me! If you knew how I hate myself for being what I am! and yet, being what I am, I cannot act otherwise than as I do. If I could, I would be true and loyal and good like you ... I would, indeed: but it seems as useless to try to change one's nature as to change one's complexion. It is not my fault, but Nature's, that 'I am a feather for each wind that blows!'—would that the next would blow me back into the quiet haven I left so recklessly!"

To Perry she wrote in a freer, friendlier strain, though the substantial meaning of her letter was the same. She was gone, and she desired him to follow her.

In the first bitterness of disappointment Perry lost self-control utterly, and acted like the distraught being he was. Kitty's letter was dashed against the wall, torn into a hundred bits, trampled under foot. Kitty's name seemed to longer the substance it had always been, and to boil it up to incendiary scorch. She was then she was heartless she was inhuman: he knew she was strong, knew the salient angles of dissipation, all in a dream. He was hot enough, however, and fit ever. He would say but if the devil ever gave him a chance. He would

be torn to pieces with red-hot pincers for her with pleasure. She should be punished as she deserved. Every penny that he had just saved for her, should be laid out upon absinthe ; and, when dying, he would find her out and breathe his last in her presence ; or, better still, would be carried to her in his coffin. Would she like that, think you ?

His actions were of a piece with his words, for Perry was consistent. He set to work, and ruined one or two masterly sketches in no time. He was always going to cafés. He would take neither reproach nor consolation from anybody.

Whom did Kitty love, then ? Whom would Kitty marry ?

Dr Norman tormented himself as much as Perry with this question.

They both knew that this sweet prodigal was unworthy of the supreme affection they had bestowed upon her ; they knew that her Yea and her Nay meant less than the Yea and Nay of other people. And yet they loved her and longed for her, and would not be compensated by anything else.

There were other and more beautiful women in the world. They only cared for this one. An old writer has said, "Beauty is not made by white or red, by black eyes and a round face, by a straight body and a smooth skin, but by a proportion to the fancy." And so it is always. We don't know why we should so love this man or this woman, so madly hunger and thirst to spend the best part of our lives with them ; but we do it, and no logic can make us desist from doing it.

Dr Norman could not help wondering whom Kitty loved ; and the wonder made him restless, sleepless, spiritless. He, as well as Perry, grew supremely miserable in unmitigated envy of that happy person. Kitty's lover, the man Kitty should love, was the king of the universe in their eyes. What had she not that was most charming in a woman ?—splendid eyes and a queenly carriage, beautiful white hands, a soft voice, and a feminine grace in saying or doing things of little moment. Kitty had everything, and Kitty wanted neither their friendship nor their love.

"I think we had better leave Paris soon and go on to

Switzerland, as we intended to do—don't you, Laura ?" asked Dr Norman, a day or two after Kitty's letter. "The weather is growing intolerably warm here."

"O papa ! just when I'm beginning to get on with my drawing," cried Laura, colouring.

"Do, dear papa, let us leave Paris ; I hate Paris ; I do so want to go," said Prissy.

"Laura gives a reason for staying, but you give no reason for going," Dr Norman said ; adding, "What is it ?"

"I don't like Paris, and that's why I want to go."

"But why do you dislike it ?"

"Because—because—I haven't seen a single Quaker in it, and I do love Quakers," cried Prissy, triumphant at having found a reason. "You remember"—for it seemed to the child that months and not weeks divided them from the life at Shelley House—"you remember, papa, don't you, dear kind old Mr Wallis, who used to wear a broad-brimmed hat, and say 'thee' and 'thou,' and give me peppermints ?"

"What nonsense, Prissy ! as if that were a reason," said Laura.

"I know your reasons well enough," said Prissy. "Laura doesn't care for anybody or anything now but Mrs Cornford and Mrs Cornford's painting. We shall never get her to go with us, papa."

Dr Norman looked from one of his children to the other, feeling quite unable to disappoint either.

"The hot weather will soon make it impossible for you to continue your long walks to the Louvre and the Rue de Trévise," he said to Laura.

"O papa ! as if I could not take an omnibus," began Laura, with almost painful eagerness.

"Papa, we shall all have sunstrokes if we stay. My poor dolls are melting already from the heat," cried Prissy.

"Well," said Dr Norman, "we will settle it to-morrow ; anyhow, Laura, we must not stay here much longer."

"Is Kitty going with us, papa ?" asked Miss Prissy, peremptorily. "That is what I want to know. Is she, or is

she not? Because, if not, I must see to my poor dolls, who haven't a summer frock to their backs. Is she, papa?"

"O child! as if Kitty cared a straw for us or the dolls!" cried Dr Norman bitterly, regretting the sarcasm ere it was fairly spoken.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

*"THE WRATH THAT WORKS LIKE MADNESS."*

LAURA cried that day as she dressed herself to go to Mrs Cornford's studio. The young girl had again become her pupil, and she would often leave her father and little sister to make their excursions alone, in order to be near her old teacher. Prissy, naturally, became much more of a companion to her father than Laura. She was passionately fond of him to begin with, and had a quick understanding, bright wit, and a singularly appreciative nature. Dr Norman's one consolation under all his troubles was the love of his little girl; and, somehow, the child seemed to know it.

Laura went as much as she liked to Mrs Cornford's, and she liked to go often. For the last few weeks she had been living in a new intoxicating world, where the lights were theatrically strong, and the music artificially entralling.

What wonder that, to an impressible nature like Laura's, the free, enthusiastic, many-coloured existence of artistic Bohemia should appear enchantment? What wonder that, having once tasted such opium, she should crave for the sugared poison of it again?

Mrs Cornford loved all young people who had winning ways; and Laura had winning ways in abundance. So Laura was always made welcome in the Rue de Trévise, or was allowed to sit by Mrs Cornford's side in the Louvre; and Perry would never fail to join them for a few minutes.

Kitty soon became a bond of union between these two. Perry seized the first opportunity of telling Laura how he had loved Kitty, and how cruelly she had used him. Laura had

loved Kitty too, better than any one in the world, she said, with tears in her eyes, and she could see that Kitty did not care so very much for her now. Then they talked of her beauty, her cleverness, her fascinations, and never grew tired. Perry was as much of a child as Laura in some things, and being encouraged, he poured out his hopes and fears to her without reserve. It was very sweet to him to be soothed and encouraged by Laura's words, and very sweet to Laura to feel that her words had such soothing power.

Thus they had become comrades ; Mrs Cornford, like the easy, reckless soul she was, making no effort to hinder the growth of this mushroom friendship. She knew well enough how most other women would have acted in her place, and felt occasional pricks of conscience ; but she excused herself by thinking that life was short, and that young people ought to enjoy it. When Laura and Perry were in the Louvre with her, she let them stroll up and down the galleries as often as they liked ; and they liked it very often. Perry would lead Laura up to a picture, and, after describing it to her in his wild, glowing way, was sure to lead the conversation to Kitty.

But there were other spells in Paris that held Laura captive. Those little breakfast parties in the Rue de Trévise, with their accompaniments of sparkling talk, good music, and unvarying enthusiasm—how charming they seemed to her ! The little country girl felt that she was only now beginning to live and to enjoy life, and she dreaded to go back to the old ways more and more. She would have been content to sweep floors and scour water-pails all the days of her existence, if she might only stay among these generous, unconventional, gifted people. The destiny of some women is to adore, and this was Laura's destiny. Affection, in the ordinary sense of the word, gives no idea of the feeling entertained by her for any human being intellectually superior to herself. Her ardent little soul was always falling down before some Juggernaut ; and if it were a cruel Juggernaut, trampling her under foot, so much the more did she worship it. Kitty had proved a

cruel Juggernaut, but Kitty's successors were infinitely more kind.

Mrs Cornford's friends loved this sweet, blue-eyed thing, who was always looking and listening her heart away, and took pains to interpret their theories to her. Laura became a Fouriérist, a Pre-Raphaelite, a Garibaldian, everything by turns, and was sometimes so many things at once that her brain grew cloudy. The sense of her own nothingness troubled her terribly sometimes. She was fain to become an hospital nurse in Italy ; to turn photographer like Vittoria ; or to join the first Phalanastery she could hear of ; to do something, no matter what, so long as it employed her faculties. She was comforted by the assurance that humanity is naturally divided into two portions—one consisting of those who cultivate Beauty as their especial province, and the other those who gather and enjoy the fruits of it. Her kind patrons, moreover, found a little employment for her, which is the best sort of consolation ; Laura was quite happy to sit for hours mending Vittoria's sacred gloves, or M. Puig's no less sacred stockings. It was impossible for any circumstance connected with genius to be common, she thought ; and to remain as a working bee amongst so sublime a community seemed the greatest good fortune that could overtake her.

But would it be allowed to overtake her ? Laura and her father had never been wholly unreserved to each other, and of late they had not grown less so. If Prissy willed a thing she spoke out, and whatever obstacle might be thrown in the way, was almost sure to gain the victory. She had more demonstrativeness than Laura, and could discuss her inmost thoughts and feelings with subtle though candid metaphysical introspection. Had she been circumstanced as Laura was, she would have made out such a case for herself that Dr Norman must have given way. There was no difficulty that Prissy could not solve as she best liked, no Gordian knot that she could not untie without assistance—Prissy being always fully impressed with the magnitude and worthiness of her own motives, than which there is nothing more necessary to success. Poor Laura

never considered her own motives of much importance, and, though she brooded over a perplexity as persistently as a bird over its eggs, nothing resulted from it.

Kitty's defection was to Laura what the lightning is to the mother whose child it has killed. Her supreme concern was for Perry. Whose sorrow was anything in comparison to his sorrow? Who deserved Kitty but he!—for Laura, like the little simple soul she was, had no idea of moral justice, and thought that Perry had no right to suffer just because he was young and gifted and beautiful.

She saw something of the reckless despondency into which Kitty's conduct threw him, and her father's unaltered bearing struck her as being very cold in comparison. Perry did not mind weeping, or tearing his hair, or saying mad things before this sweet thing, who would put her little hands entreatingly on his arm, and beg him to be consoled, with big tears in her blue eyes.

If Perry said to her half fiercely—

“How can you bear to be with a madman? Do go away.”

Or, in a humble, tender tone—

“O, Miss Norman, it is not good for you to be here, however much we may like it!”—Laura would go home half crazed with a new sense of delight.

If Perry played, as only Perry could play, mysterious snatches of the music he loved best, the child sat listening in a trance. Kitty and Perry seemed god and goddess to her; the two beings alone worthy of all worship and all good things. Who else could do what they could do, or were so beautiful and winning?

Kitty having dropped like a star below the horizon, there arose this new, large, luminous orb in its place; and she could not choose but adore doubly. Day by day, hour by hour, she was ever trying to brace herself up for a great effort; she must hint to her father how her heart would break if he forced her from Paris. The thought of speaking seemed hardly less terrible to her than that of silence. If some one, if something would only help her. But she knew she should have no help,

and she put her momentous request into every available shape, trying to find a happy one. To go straight to her father, as Prissy would have done, and say, "Papa, I like being in Paris best, don't make me go away," was simply impossible; and to throw herself in tears upon his breast, and declare that he was making her unhappy, no less so. Timidity begets something very like cunning in the purest minds, and Laura at length came to the decision that she must invent a sufficient excuse. So one day she went up to Dr Norman, and said, very pleadingly—

"Papa, don't you think it would be a good thing for me to draw so well that I might earn my own living if I wanted?"

"Good heavens, Laura! who has put that notion into your head?"

Dr Norman was an ultra-Liberal in theory, advocating every kind of moral and intellectual improvement for both men and women, but often in practice as arrant a Conservative as any going.

"I have thought of it myself, papa. I have, indeed."

"Then the sooner you get rid of the notion the better. It is all very well for some women to strike out independent careers for themselves; in a few cases it is admirable; but you are the last person fitted to do so."

"Why, dear papa?" asked Laura, already on the verge of crying.

"There are a dozen Whys and Wherefores, my dear. You will make a dear little housekeeper, and that can be said of very few girls. Take my advice, and be contented for a time in your proper sphere."

"And is that Prissy's sphere?" said Laura, the corners of her mouth going down.

"Prissy is a mere baby at present; it is impossible to say the sort of woman she will develop into; but as far as I can judge, she has much more of the peculiar sort of character requisite for battling with the world than you have."

Laura, by a great effort, contested the point a little longer. She might have to battle with the world, she said, and it could

not do any harm to be fitted for whatever might happen. Mrs Cornford said she had a decided talent for drawing, and Mrs Cornford was a judge. Dr Norman heard her to the end, and, when she had done, looked up with a shrewd smile, saying—

“And I think I know whither all this high-flown utilitarianism is tending, Laura. You wish to stay in Paris, and go on taking lessons of Mrs Cornford.”

Laura turned crimson, and had not a word to say.

Dr Norman continued—

“If Mrs Cornford were a different person altogether, I should not mind; but you are old enough to know the sort of objection we must have to her, I think.”

“She is not quite a lady, you mean, papa?”

“Exactly; with all her good qualities, she is quite without the habits of respectable society. I should not like you to catch her tone.”

A sort of despair took possession of the child, and she turned away to hide the tears that she knew she could restrain no longer. Dr Norman thought it high time to end the discussion.

“Of course you must please yourself, my dear,” he said. “I should never dream of interfering with any decision you might deliberately make concerning your own career. Remember that.”

And then he left her to reflect upon the words.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *PITFALLS.*

DR NORMAN finally fixed the day for leaving Paris, and Laura counted the hours as they passed with a terrible feeling of reluctance. Could she go? She said to herself a dozen times a day that she could not, and yet she was possessed of so little resisting power that she made no legitimate effort to stay. She took everybody in her confidence by turns—Mrs Cornford,



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Vittoria, Tommie, even Monsieur Puig, and each gave her counsel, though not of available sort. Of Perry she could not, for some inexplicable reason, make a confidant ; and the consciousness of having a secret from him made their conversations less sympathetic and less delightful to look back upon. Once or twice he had said to her—

“ You look ill ; you sit among Mrs Cornford’s oils too much. You should not come to her in the hottest part of the day,” accompanying the words with an underlying concern which set the child’s heart beating almost wildly. It was quite a new thing to Laura to find her small individuality recognised to the full by another person. Kitty had done it, but Kitty was not a man, and Kitty was too much in the habit of recognising individualities in general to render her recognition inestimable. Perry was so delightfully frank in his approval of persons and things, and at the same time so full of reverence for everybody excepting himself, that one felt attracted to him as to a child. Even whilst he was praising her, Laura seemed to be protecting him ; and the need to go on protecting him grew stronger within her day by day.

If he said, “ Who will make me leave off work when my head aches ? ” or, “ I shall have no one to talk over my troubles to, and no one to look after me and keep me out of scrapes, when you are gone, Miss Norman,” she repeated the words to herself again and again, smiling and crying. There had been all along so much frankness in their intimacy, that regrets on both sides at the prospect of parting occasioned very little comment. Laura could freely tell Mrs Cornford that she liked Perry very much, and that she should never forgive Kitty for her conduct to him. Perry could as freely talk of Laura’s charming ways and blind admiration of every one and everything connected with art.

“ I wish I had never seen Kitty,” he happened to say to Mrs Cornford, “ and then perhaps ”—— but there he halted.

“ I wish you had never seen my little Laura,” Mrs Cornford answered. “ I ought to have known better than to let her come to the house so often ; and as I didn’t, you ought.”

"As if men are expected to know better than women, under any circumstances," Perry said. "You must know, Polly, that you are alone responsible for any mischief that occurs under your roof."

Mrs Cornford painted vehemently for a few minutes, and then said—

"If you have led on that sweet girl to fall in love with you, Perry, I'll never forgive you as long as I live."

"Good heavens!" Perry cried, turning suddenly red; "it's preposterous—it's impossible—it's ridiculous beyond measure! Why, Laura is a mere child, and—and I care for nobody but Kitty."

"You have never hinted to Laura that you wish her to stay here?"

"One might do that in all innocence," he said, in a crest-fallen manner; adding, "If words are such dangerous things, the dumb are to be envied."

"You goose! There are different ways of saying many harmless things. A very little would turn Laura's head."

"Do you think it is turned?"

"Well, we'll say on the verge of it, to pacify you; but take my advice, and mind your P's and Q's for the next three days. It is now Monday, and she goes on Thursday. I shall watch you like a sheep-dog till then."

"I hope you will," sighed Perry; "it's just the ruin of a man being left to himself." And then he went to his studio, resolving to keep away from Laura as much as possible.

Meantime Mrs Cornford was trying to make up for her inconsiderate conduct by good advice. From morning till night she dosed Laura with prudential maxims, having no especial application. If Laura expressed a meek regret at the prospect of parting, she was answered by some such dictum as this—

"Well, every hen must lay its own egg, you know, my dear, and it's as well to cackle and be pleased over it as not."

Or if Laura said, sighing, "Oh dear, Mrs Cornford, my life

is so dull at home—you don't know how dull it is!" the rejoinder would be—

"Oh! for the matter of that, we all envy our neighbour's puddings, child; but then they have to eat uninteresting things sometimes as well as we." And whatever Laura happened to talk of was capped with an improvised aphorism, after this fashion—

"Whistle and swallow no dust, or you'll never clean me," says the horse to the ostler; or, "My master is all very well," as the dog said to his neighbour, "but I do wish he'd a tail to wag when he's pleased," which was *à propos* of people's discontent in general, and of Laura's in particular. Or, "My ears are as God made 'em, as the donkey said to the fool," which was *à propos* of nothing.

Laura listened patiently, quite at a loss to account for Mrs Cornford's change of manner. Mrs Cornford had always been apt at proverb-making, but it was new for her to turn preacher, and she preached at poor little Laura with a vengeance. A dozen times a day she was told to honour her father and mother, that her days might be long in the land; to be a good girl, and do what everybody wiser than herself told her to do, &c., &c.

Laura's gentle heart swelled with indignation under this treatment. Who had led her on to love art, and everything connected with it, more than Mrs Cornford? Who had dwelt more strongly upon her taste for drawing? Who had given more prominence to the very sort of decision against which she was now warning her from morning till night? Mrs Cornford was, in fact, too late repenting of a series of follies. She had seen how happy it made Laura to be among them, all the time having no heart to keep her away. She had seen how the little thing was falling in love with them all, with Perry especially, day by day, and she had no heart to stop that either. It pleased and amused her to watch the moral and intellectual development of this sweet wild flower of a woman, and the wild flower blossomed ere she was aware. Mrs Cornford saw no better way of undoing her work than to snatch

the poor flower from its forced atmosphere, and place it in its native woods again.

" You know, chick," she would say, " it breaks all our hearts to lose you, but we are vagabonds on the face of the world, and you are a little lady. We're the best of friends, though we keep each other at a distance, as the oil said to the vinegar."

" But I shall see you sometimes?" Laura urged, in a frightened voice.

" Well, I suppose so; but, if not, there is no earthly use of sentimentalising over it. A little sentiment, like a pinch of smelling salts, goes a long way."

" O! Mrs Cornford," Laura said, beseechingly, " what have I done that you don't want me to come among you again?"

" You goosey! who said that? You may come again as much as you like; but you'll be in Switzerland, and we shall be we don't know where. Have you a pair of seven-leagued boots?"

" I wish I had," Laura answered.

" And so do I; but as you haven't, and I haven't, why, let us agree to cut each other with a good grace, whether we come again or not. I'm sorry enough to lose you, I'm sure! You have sat for me as Rosalind, as Undine, as Gretchen, and I could find half a dozen more characters for you. But papa takes you to Switzerland, and so all our pretty plans are done for."

Laura then turned to Vittoria, and from her found sympathy, which was comfort indeed. Though in love, Vittoria recognised an intellectual need as something solemn; and perhaps—for who so quick at reading women's secrets as the woman who has once had a secret of her own?—she recognised the other need that enthralled Laura to Paris.

" You are too young as yet," she said, " to take upon yourself the sacrifice of a direct for an indirect duty. If you were as old as I am, it would be different"—Vittoria had reached the age of twenty-five—"but you are in the first enthusiasm for art, which does not always last," she said, sighing.

" It is not so much that," Laura began, eagerly; " I feel as

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if I owed more to you all than to any one in the world, and as if I could only give forced affection to others. I was never happy till I came here."

"Duty is not always happiness," said Vittoria, gravely.

"But it must be easier to do one's duty when one is happy."

"Quite true; and we are right in seeking the best happiness for ourselves, provided it is also the best happiness of others."

"I don't think I add to any one's happiness much at home," poor Laura said, humbly; "I am looked upon as such a helpless sort of thing—even by Prissy."

"But ever so little love of art, as long as it is genuine, widens one's sympathies, and therefore one's power of helping. You know, Laura dear, about one woman in a thousand, and no more, is strong enough to stand alone in the world; and these family ties and affections, that seem prison walls now, will prove welcome defences by and by."

"Then I must go home, and see no more pictures and no more artists, never paint any more, and be contented?"

"You must go home and remember us always, and, when you are a little older, choose to take part and lot with us if you still feel as you do now. That is what I say," said Vittoria, kissing her, "and that is what my Victor says too, and he is wise."

Vittoria, like Mrs Cornford, felt a little responsible on Laura's behalf. For the last few weeks they had been talking art to the child—art in season and art out of season—till it was no wonder that her head was fairly turned by it. She had been dragged from gallery to gallery, from studio to studio; had heard discussions on the works of Ingres, of Gerôme, of Meissonier, of Frère; had been deluged with artistic slang from morning till night. It was like giving strong meat to babes, and Laura naturally underwent the pains of mental indigestion. They had taught her that there was nothing worth having in life but art, and art she could not have! Vittoria's appealing faith in her, and the weight Vittoria gave to her inmost aspirations, afforded consolation, however. She was growing older

—oh ! happy thought !—and she prayed that the years might come and go quickly.

On the occasion of what was to be Laura's last visit to the Rue de Trévisé, no personalities were brought forward, and everybody laughed and talked, in order that the child might be cheered.

When it came to adieux, Monsieur Puig kissed her on each cheek after quite a paternal manner. Vittoria embraced her with tears, and the three children struggled for the last kiss. Mrs Cornford said she would accompany her to the cab-stand, and Perry proposed to go too, as there was a large *bouquin* to carry, Monsieur Puig's parting gift. The three descended, Mrs Cornford adjusting bonnet and shawl as she went away.

"When shall we three meet again?" she said, blithely. "If never, it won't be my fault. Oh, dear! there's that tiresome picture-framer, Giraud, and I must turn back with him. Well, Perry, you will see her safely into the omnibus—if you don't get a fiacre—won't you? Good-bye, my dear. See all you can on your travels, and say nothing about them when you come back. That's the best advice I can give you."

Laura and Perry walked on with some vague sort of conviction that the walk was critical, and that the sooner it was over the more easy in mind they should feel. Laura had not realised till now how much more personality had contributed to make the last few weeks so turbulently sweet. All the passionate longings in Laura's heart—longings that even Vittoria had not quite understood—were tending to a climax, under the influence of Perry's sudden, mysterious shyness. "Oh! why are we together?" was the child's agonised thought, and both felt but too mistrustful of the issue that lay in their hands.

They crossed the Boulevard, and walked along the gay Rue Vivienne, seeing nothing with their eyes, hearing nothing with their ears. The burden of an unspoken romance kept repeating itself in their hearts, high above the ebb and flow of Parisian street life; and though Perry had heard such a burden before, it charmed and chastened him still.

Laura tried to be indifferent ; but she could not prattle in the old way, and she wondered to herself if it would be very wrong to have out their trouble, like children, before saying good-bye. She was quite a child in some things, and she felt conscious of no sinfulness in this clinging grief at separation.

"If I had been like Prissy, I should have made a great fuss, and papa would have stayed," she said, artlessly. "Prissy always gains her point."

"Ah!" Perry answered, in a tone of reproach, "you would have gained your point, too, had you cared enough about it."

She looked troubled and changed colour ; the corners of the sweet mouth turned down, the long soft eyelashes grew moistened with tears.

"I did care about it," she began ; "it is very unkind of you to say that."

The sight of her tears moved Perry to instantaneous penitence, and in his penitence he said a dozen unwise things. He said that if it had not been for Laura he should have sunk within the last few weeks into an abyss of degradation ; that it was she, and none other, who had saved him hitherto, and she was going to desert him now ; that, having lost all hope in the world, her friendship was still dear and valuable to him, and he did not know how he should be able to live without it.

Then, seeing Laura's innocent face so moved by his words, he forgot the duty he owed to himself and to her, and went on, alternately raving, confiding, approving, till her senses were in a whirl.

In this stage of their infatuation they reached the distracting Bureau des Omnibus, in the Palais Royal. Perry took Laura's ticket, number thirty-two, and they sat down, hoping thirty-two would not be called yet. Perry drummed with his fingers on the hard cover of the *bouquin* ; Laura looked steadily another way.

A French Bureau des Omnibus is a pandemonium, indeed—only that the devils are very harmless and rather melancholy-looking Frenchmen, in official costume. But how they torment

and terrify the unfortunate public who travel by omnibus ! If in a hurry, you are as a mouse in the claws of two or three imperturbable cats ; and if you are complacent, you are worried just the same.

Laura and Perry heard nothing but the beating of their own hearts, and the numbers as called out by the conductor.

The two omnibuses had filled, and the last number called had been twenty-nine. Surely Laura's turn would come very soon. They listened for the signal of parting—dreading it, longing for it, with a sort of self-preserving instinct.

A third omnibus drew up, and whilst an eager crowd pressed to the door, the conductor proclaimed two vacant places.

“*Trente.*”

Number thirty took his seat.

“*Trente-un.*”

Number thirty-one took his seat. The door was closed, the omnibus filed of, and Laura and Perry breathed again. When at last the signal was given—*Trente-deux*—Laura rose in extreme discomposure. “Give me my ticket ; the place is for me,” she cried.

“ You will come back to us before very long ? ” he asked, in the way of one who exacts a promise.

“ Yes,” she answered, flushing and faltering.

“ *À voiture, mademoiselle, s'il vous plaît,*” cried the conductor, at the top of his voice, and Perry handed her in. As the heavy vehicle was driving off, he got a last look and a last word, and both of them told him what he felt he ought not to know.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### *WHAT DEAD SEA APPLES TASTE OF.*

IT was only natural that Laura's disturbed mood should be imputed to the coming separation from her friends, Mrs Cornford and Vittoria, and Dr Norman and Prissy did their very best to inspire her with cheerfulness. Prissy had never been

to the Rue de Trévisé, and Dr Norman only once or twice ; so that the probable share Perry might have in Laura's reluctance to leave Paris never once occurred to them. Laura, therefore, escaped the sarcasm that would have been hardest to bear.

For Prissy was a terrible little satirist, without any idea of moderation where a possible witticism was concerned. She kept a sharp eye upon all poor Laura's weak points, and lashed her severely when any of them led her into the committal of folly.

"Look at Laura's queer old book, papa !" she cried, as Laura quietly deposited the *bouquin* of hard hide upon the table. "Who gave it to you ?"

"Monsieur Puig," said Laura ; "he is a very clever political writer, and is engaged to marry Vittoria Bianchi."

Prissy took up a corner of her apron, and, thus armed, opened the *bouquin* gingerly.

"It's a very dirty old thing," she said. "Is Monsieur Pig"—

"Puig," said Laura, impatiently.

"Is Monsieur Puig a little dirty too ?"

Dr Norman could not forbear a laugh at Laura's expense.

"I am afraid we can't answer for our friends in the Rue de Trévisé on that score, Laura. They love art better than soap and water."

"O papa !"

"You can't deny, my dear, that it's not alone Monsieur Puig's inky shirt, or Mademoiselle Vittoria's wristbands, that bear out my statement. Mrs Cornford, whom I respect from the bottom of my heart, certainly likes water as little as a land-rat, and Mr Perugino—well, Mr Perugino—must I say it, Laura ?—Mr Perugino won't be driven into marrying his laundress because her bill is too heavy to pay."

For a minute or two Laura was speechless from indignation.

"I would rather see people a little careless in those things than wrapped up in their own affairs, and living without ideas."

"But does it follow that one cannot be clean and clever too ? What a little casuist you are where your friends are concerned."

"I'm sure if there are any mice in Mrs Cornford's house, Laura loves them better than she does us two, papa," Prissy said, looking up from the *bouquin*, which contained some quaint woodcuts; adding, "Oh! what a queer book for Mr Pig to give you, Laura: I have seen three pictures of the devil in it!"

"Why do you look at it, then?" Laura cried, in a fit of childish passion; "and you know it isn't true what you say about the mice, Prissy. Papa, it is very unkind of Prissy to talk in that way."

"We didn't mean to be uncivil, and we beg your pardon, my dear, don't we, Prissy?" said Dr Norman, kindly

Then Laura burst into tears. Dr Norman hastened to his own room, and Prissy became penitent in a moment.

"It's a dear book—a sweet book," she said, hugging the *bouquin* in her arms, and kissing her sister. "And you might know I was in fun about the mice, Laura, dear."

The little squabble passed over; but, absent as Dr Norman habitually was, he noticed all that day Laura's pale looks and quick uneasy glances. She turned red and white without any cause, started at the merest sound, and her eyes never for a moment lost a certain lustre that was new to them. When night came, and they were alone, he could no longer keep his thoughts to himself.

"My dear Laura," he said, "it is childish of you to think that I shall let you go on with us now."

Laura stood aghast.

"I don't want to make you miserable, of course. At first sight, it seemed most likely that you should be happier with your father and little sister than with any friends, but there is no deciding for others, and I have always desired you to decide for yourself. You can, therefore, stay."

"Papa," Laura began, with a sob, "I know you are vexed with me"—

"Never mind me," Dr Norman said, a little impatiently; "I can't expect you to think as I do in everything, and you are not a baby. You must begin to decide for yourself. You decide to stay. Good; I accept your decision."

And with that he left her.

Poor Laura ! she warred between two longings—the longing to make Perry's life happier, and the longing to be dutiful to her father. One minute she was saying to herself that she would only stay a little time in Paris, and not desert Dr Norman after all ; another, she was contriving all sorts of plans for Perry's comfort. Meantime, she saw her luggage separated from the rest ; she heard the order given for a carriage next morning to drive Monsieur and Mademoiselle to the Rue de Trévise ; she watched her father's and Prissy's cloaks and umbrellas put in the railway, with a vague feeling that she must be going too. But she was not going. From the time of interchanging that secret compact with Perry up till now, she had never once doubted the sweet selfish creed of youthful passion to be a true one. She relied so uncompromisingly for the time upon any judgment stronger than her own, that, had she gone to a third oracle, she would have fallen down before it, and again surrender her opinion. Believing Perry to be wrong and her father to be right, what course was left open to her but to cleave to the one and forsake the other ? Could she give up Perry ? Could she give up her father and Prissy ?—for Prissy, being her sister, she felt that she ought to love her almost as well as those two. Laura did not sleep very well that night, and longed for the morning, which must put some sort of end to her miserable indecision. Once or twice she consoled herself by recalling Perry's looks and words, though shyly, and with the feeling that such self-indulgence was wrong. Who could have imagined that her dream would ever come true ?—for Laura, like other young girls, had had her dreams. She smiled to herself, thinking how sweet and good it was to be cared for by any one like Perry. The thought of his passion for Kitty bore no bitterness with it, for she felt childishly sure that she herself was something to him now. The first streak of light seemed to smite all happy and peaceful thoughts like a cold sword-blade. The poor child started up, and put her hair from her face, crying to herself, distractedly, “ What shall I do—oh ! what shall I do ? ”

Prissy, who slept in a little bed close by, was also awake early, for the journey to Frankfort, and from thence up the Rhine, had numberless excitements for her.

"Do let us get up, Laura," she said; "we are going to Germany, where the people eat pumpernickel. Oh! I am so glad!"

"Why should we get up yet?" Laura asked, wearily. "There is nothing to do."

"You haven't three dolls' clothes to put away, and a tea-set, and I don't know what besides. It's all very well for you to lie in bed, Laura, but it won't do for me."

And thereupon Prissy jumped out of bed, wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, and, opening the door an inch wide, called out—

"Garçon, de l'eau chaude, toute de suite, s'il vous plaît."

"How absurd!" said Laura. "Who do you think will be up at this hour?"

Then she turned her head on the pillow, and dozed a little; and when she awoke again the sun was shining brightly, and Prissy had gone away. She got through the business of her toilette after a very listless fashion; and when it was done, sat down, not having courage to join her father and Prissy down-stairs. At last Prissy came running to say that breakfast was ready, and that they were waiting for her.

"And really, Laura, your unpunctuality is something dreadful," she added, with a mock assumption of authority.

"Has Laura told you that you and I are to go on our travels alone?" asked Dr Norman of Prissy, as they sat down to table.

"Papa!" cried Prissy, looking from one to the other with inexpressible dismay.

Dr Norman went on with assumed cheerfulness—

"Of course it is a great disappointment, but disappointing things must be made the best of. Only remember that we shall expect to hear from you regularly, Laura."

"I will not stay here if you think it wrong, papa"—

"My dear child, it is a little late to refer the question to me

now. Having decided for yourself yesterday that you could not leave Paris, by all means act upon that decision"—

"But indeed—indeed I want to do what you wish," began poor Laura.

"And indeed I want you to please yourself; so that we might go on all day begging the question. The simplest solution of the difficulty is to try your new friends, and come back to the old when you are tired of them."

Prissy broke into passionate deprecations of Laura's ingratitude, which Dr Norman checked, and the little party finished breakfast as if nothing had happened.

Laura's heart had given a great bound at the final assurance that her promise to Perry was to be kept; but after that first revulsion of feeling she could only think of her father, and of the secret she was withholding from him.

Dr Norman bade her say good-bye to Prissy, and hurried her off in his usual absent, pre-occupied way, with a little, though very little, show of vexation.

Arrived at their destination, they found everybody in bed; and as Dr Norman had to catch an early train, and had no particular desire to see Mrs Cornford, he scribbled a hasty letter, commanding Laura to her care and protection for the next three or four weeks. He enclosed in the letter a bank-note for Laura's expenses during the time, and, after reiterating his request that she should write very often, he kissed her and went away.

By and by Mrs Cornford came out of her room to open the shutters and light the fire, in dressing-gown and slippers. She received Laura and Laura's explanation of herself with the sort of unmitigated surprise that is sure to imply reproach.

"That's exactly what I expected of you, you dear little fool!" she said. "Well, God made one as well as t'other, as the man said who had a wart on his nose. Where you'll sleep I haven't the least idea, unless in the wood-cupboard; but never mind; you're here, and when we make a pudding ourselves, we ought to eat it without making faces. But I did give Dr Norman credit for knowing better. Well, we'll see

what he says for himself. Poor man! who would be a widower with children growing up, I wonder? And what a sum he sends for your bread and butter! Why, child, he must think you have the appetite of the man who ate a leg of mutton at a meal; but your papa is just the man to get imposed upon, and wants as much looking after as a baby. Why ever didn't"—

She broke off from her sentence, for, impudent though she was, she never linked the names of Kitty and Dr Norman together in Laura's hearing.

Laura took off her bonnet and cloak with a very disconcerted air, feeling convicted of folly. But would not Perry say something kind and comforting?

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *AT FONTAINEBLEAU.*

WHILST Perry had been trying to ruin himself, body and mind, in which course sweet Laura's love seemed to stay him a little—whilst Dr Norman went his quiet ways, sad and puzzled over many things—what was Kitty doing? Where was this goddess of theirs, whose favoured lover must be, as they thought, a king among common men?

Kitty was at Fontainebleau—no farther—enjoying to the full the delicious perfection of summer-time there, wanting no new lovers, troubled now and then for the old, troubled also about some other things, but not too troubled to be her gay, bewitching, animating self. It was astonishing how strongly she possessed the power of enjoying, and of imparting the same power, though in a similar degree, to others. It is so with all forcible natures; idiosyncracies emanate from them as light from luminous bodies.

They had made up a little party, to which Kitty stood in much the same sort of relationship as a conductor to his orchestra, holding herself responsible for every discord. Of

course she succeeded admirably. She got up the most perfect little picnics without apparent trouble. The morning would be brilliant, the men would put on alpaca coats, the ladies muslin dresses, and open carriages would drive up exactly when they were ready, and carry them to the beautiful woods, where they had strawberries and cakes and champagne, and enjoyed everything without reservation.

Then there were little dinners and breakfasts, musical parties, sketching parties, and a multitude of pleasant changes rung upon a pleasant tune.

Kitty had taken great care to bring no dull people away from Paris, disliking dull people more than she disliked liars and hypocrites, and the greatest sinners on the face of the earth.

“What right have the stupid to expect the clever to love them, and be civil?” she would say, mercilessly; and she called dulness a disease which was as catching as measles, and avoided it accordingly.

Granted that this policy is selfish, does it not save one from all manner of polite hypocrisies? Our dear dull friends smack their lips over our cakes and ale, and proclaim to all the world how simple we are with all our wit, and how we love them, whilst all the time we have been, figuratively speaking, tearing our hair, wringing our hands, and crying, “Ye gods, deliver us!”

First and foremost of their party was a young English lady named Ella Bartelotte, and her father, a baronet and a widower.

Ella Bartelotte was one of those tiny, fragile, diaphanous-looking women who remain children all their lives—which are not often long—and fascinate people by their helplessness and angelic bearing of what may be described as a negative existence. Of an organisation so weak that the exercise of almost every sense carried pain with it, she yet contrived to dabble in music, books, travel, and talk, and enjoy them all. Her lungs were weak; her digestive powers of no better quality; her brain incapable of any lengthened

stress ; her eyes as soon tired as her slender little wrists. But she had a gentle face and sweet voice, and, though she only liked people here and there, counted her lovers and friends by dozens.

Sir George was an exceedingly moral but hard-natured man, whom nothing but an invalid daughter could have made at all human, and whose humanity was always assuming an apologetic attitude, as if a little ashamed of itself. But no one could be more useful in the capacity of a travelling companion than he, for he went into all the details of expenditure as if he were a courier, and got the best of everything for himself and his party without ever being cheated of a halfpenny. He was liberal, too, in providing pleasures for people his daughter liked, and she liked Kitty, she told him, almost better than any woman she knew.

"She has so much taste, papa," she would say, "a thing few women have. And she is so warm-hearted and kindly—too much so for this cold world. I can't think where she learned all her amiability ; it is as perfect as a work of art."

Then there were some musical people ; a gifted Italian gentleman and his wife, who were Myra's guests and protégés, of course, and who showed their appreciation of such good hostesses by playing and singing divinely whenever they were asked to do so.

There was also a Mr Tyrell, one of those Englishmen whom one never fails to encounter abroad, who sketch a little, play a little, have a dozen foreign idioms at their tongue's end, are veritable enthusiasts where foreign art or climate or scenery are concerned, and turn up from year to year at Rome, on the Nile, in Norway, at the Swiss baths, no matter where—looking as young, as gay, and as much absorbed in their dilettantism as ever. They don't write, they don't read, they don't care a straw about politics or social reform, but they enjoy life to perfection.

And there was a Captain Longley, who hated everything that was not English, and whose chief pleasure in foreign travel seemed to consist in abusing it, who made up the party.

It must be admitted that Captain Longley made himself very agreeable to everybody, and could by no means have been spared. He was exceedingly clever, too ; knew exactly what was going on in England ; had seen active service, and explored savage countries, all of which he could describe brilliantly ; had read every French and English novel, good, bad, or indifferent, and was so good-natured that you were sure to find him looking after all the most uninteresting women, whether young or old, at a party. Beside these, there was a constant ebb and flow of visitors from Paris. No two days were alike. The amusements were always well-assorted and elegant. The temper of the party was harmonious. What wonder that at Fontainebleau Kitty began to forget ? An atmosphere of roses dulls the senses alike to pain and duty, and she was living in an atmosphere of the sweetest.

About seven in the morning Françine brought in a cup of tea, and, having opened the window, let in a puff of delicious air. Françine prepared her bath, and laid out her clothes, a white muslin morning-dress or something equally enticing ; then, after the dawdling delights of the toilette, and half-an-hour spent in plucking roses for the table, there would come the breakfast, and the long morning-drive, and the tea in the forest, and the late dinner, and the talk and music in the beautiful summer twilight, with scents of flowers and twittering of birds coming through the open windows.

Kitty thought of her old life at Fulham with a shudder. How dreadful it would be to return to the squalor of it, the hand-to-mouth struggle of it, the vulgarity, not to say coarseness, of it ! Shelley House had been an improvement upon Paradise Place, but she felt as if she should find it hardly more bearable now, what with the disorderliness and noise of the children, and the absence of anything like elegance there.

For life to Kitty was as one of the fine arts to an enthusiastic student, ever revealing some new faculty in herself, and a fair field for its exercise. She looked down loftily upon ordinary men and women, who are content to go in whatever narrow road Providence has placed them, with self-complacent pity,

thinking, "Poor fools! poor fools! you act as if life were a lottery, instead of a campaign in which the strategist is sure to win"—feeling so secure herself in her sense of youth and wit and ability.

Sometimes her exquisite strategy would be worsted by the merest chance. When, for instance, Myra came to her one morning, all blushes and perplexity, saying—

"What do you think, Kitty? I know Captain Longley wishes me to marry him."

"Oh, dear!" Kitty said, forgetting to conceal her genuine dismay, "Oh, dear!"

Myra did not seem to think the matter so deplorable, and began to discuss it seriously.

"There are two sides to the question, I dare say. Captain Longley is poor—that is, compared to me—and a wee wee bit younger. Then he has female relations. I hate a man's female relations. But, on the other hand, how clever he is, how good-natured, how amusing!—not handsome, perhaps—but only fools need to be handsome: and he is so chivalrous, that I believe he would jump into the white bear's cage in the Zoological Gardens if ever so ugly a woman dropped her parasol in it. Oh, darling! what is the matter? you are crying!"

Kitty dashed away a tear or two, laughing self-derisively.

"What a supreme idiot I am!" she cried, still laughing and crying. "I wonder whether other people are always making such discoveries about themselves? No; I'm worse than an idiot, Myra; I'm a selfish, self-absorbed, self-interested wretch, that's what I am, and if I cry, is it any wonder?"

"What do you mean?" asked Myra, petting her.

"What do I mean?" cried Kitty, in a passion of grief and self-contempt. "Myra, you are as blindly unconscious of what is going on before your very eyes as a new-born baby! As if I could rejoice in the prospect of your marriage—I, who love you better than any one in all the world—I, whose very bread is the gift of your hands, whose life were worthless but for you! Can't you see how it will be with us two if you marry Captain Longley, or anybody? It will be happiness, a completed life

to you. It will be death in life to me. But"—here her voice grew thick, and she slipped down to a low stool, and hid her face in Myra's lap. "You must marry him since you wish it, and I shall still be bound to you as long as I live."

It was only natural that Myra should cry a little too, and, after having wept with her friend, try to reassure her by every possible means. Why should a marriage divide them at all, or, at any rate, for a time? And why should not Kitty herself marry by and by? Nothing should induce her to prove ungrateful to her dearest friend—nothing in the whole world. Kitty must smile and look happy, since there was so little to be miserable about. Of course, Myra would always keep a home for her; and Kitty was so attractive, so handsome, so universally worshipped, that it was quite preposterous to entertain any doubt regarding the future. And much more Myra said, with her arms round her friend's neck all the while.

Kitty heard to the end, passionately impatient. When Myra had done, she broke into a torrent of words, compared with which Myra's had been as the chirpings of a timid sparrow to the cries of an enraged eagle.

"Oh! yes, I am to smile and look happy! But you spoiled children of fortune don't know what life is to us outcasts."

"My dear Kitty!" Myra interposed, quite shocked.

"Yes; outcasts, pariahs, scapegoats of society—those are the proper names for us," Kitty went on, fiercely. "We women who have no home, no friends, no money, being born into the world without being consulted—we must live, and life becomes a game of chess. We don't like work, we don't like poverty, we don't like vice; but we like ease and wealth and good repute, and we win them somehow. How? Oh! the difference between an estate inherited and an estate thus borrowed! The one is as strong and steadfast as a mansion, the other ephemeral as the spider's web hanging to its porch. You are the lady of the manor, I am the parasitic spider which has fed upon your bounty. What can I expect, but to be swept away when the mansion is made ready for a wedding."

She seized Myra's hands and held them to her cheek, laughing and crying.

"The worst of it is that spiders have affections," she cried. "As a sister, I love you, Myra, and do not sisters lose each other when they marry? Oh! lonely, miserable me!"

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### CHAPTER XXX.

#### *A REPRIEVE AND A SENTENCE.*

"Oh! lonely, miserable me!" cried Kitty, with the tears streaming down her beautiful face. How could an insignificant little sparrow find withal to comfort a grand eagle? Myra could only reiterate her first words of affectionate consolation, drop a little kiss on her friend's hand, clasp her round the waist, and so on.

But she chanced to let fall the careless phrase which Kitty caught and clung to, as a drowning creature to a straw.

"And Captain Longley hasn't really proposed yet!"—and Kitty so impressed Myra with the dignity and advantage of being a little dilatory in love matters, that she decided to keep her admirer in suspense for the present. Having inserted the thin edge of the wedge, Kitty managed the whole affair beautifully. Captain Longley being made to see that, for some reasons or other, Myra wished to keep matters in a preliminary state a little longer, went back to Paris in a pet, and Kitty breathed again.

But she felt that her house was built on sand, and looked around for safer foundations. Her reprieve might be very short. She knew well enough that, when Myra married, everything must change for Myra's dependant, who was also her friend; and knowing this, was it little wonder that her cheeks grew thin, and that her nights were weary? Sometimes she felt ready to act the prodigal in good earnest; but then she had sinned against so many fathers, she knew not to which of them to go. The purple robe, the gold ring, and the

fatted calf awaited her in either case, and in spirit she leaned towards them, though in the flesh she halted and hung back. Had she cared one shade more for Perry or for Dr Norman, affection would have kicked the beam ; she wished that she could care for some one, no matter for whom, and not live only in her ambitions. Balzac says, "*La grande force sociale, c'est le caractère,*" and his words prove themselves true a hundred times a day. Had Kitty possessed a slipshod character, her life would have been a very ordinary story ; as it is, she was so rich in will, in understanding, and in purpose, that even without the personal advantages that made her richer, she could, under no circumstance, have remained insignificant. There are times, however, when even success in the battle of life becomes a weariness ; and Kitty, who had been successful beyond her expectations, lost heart now and then. Wealth was pleasant, and she felt as if she could not live without it now ; but she wished it were to be had for the asking. Rank was pleasant too, and that was much dearer than she had bargained for. Affection was her weak point ; she could not bear a dog, no matter however ugly, to love other people better than herself ; and affection, when coveted thus largely and unreasonably, costs more than anything else in the world. She would sit for hours in her pretty room during these perfect summer mornings, thinking of all these things, and trying to find a way to be happier. Her friends were legion ; which of them could help her now ?

One of these reveries was disturbed in an unexpected fashion. She got a letter from Dr Norman. The letter lay for some time unopened, not from any dread of what he might have written, but from vexation that he had written at all. Why could he not leave her in peace for a little while ? She was always comparing her own conduct with that of her lovers, much to their disadvantage, forgetting that they cared for her with their whole hearts, which certainly made the case a little different.

There lay the letter. Her little maid came in with a pretty gift of flowers from one of her friends, and a message—"Miss

Bartelotte was going to drive in the Bois at four o'clock ; would mademoiselle go with her ? "

Kitty nodded affirmatively ; and, when Fran<sup>c</sup>ine had gone, took up the letter, turning pale at the bulkiness of it. She was walking up and down, lacking courage to break the seal, when Myra peeped in, all smiles and sunshine.

"Kitty, I am going to breakfast next door, but I didn't tell you, as you must keep quiet, so as to be bright and entertaining at our little dinner to-night."

This speech did not make Kitty feel happier in mind.

"What a slave I am !" she said to herself, half aloud ; and then she took the letter gently, feeling where her freedom lay.

Who so free in all the world as Dr Norman's wife would be ? Who so free, so honoured, so happy ?

And with this thought in her mind, she summoned courage to put herself in communication with him.

The letter was dated Heidelberg, and ran as follows—

"MY DEAR KITTY,—When we parted in the Rue de Trévisé some weeks ago, it was with no compact of silence on my part, and all the more, therefore, I excuse myself for disturbing you by a long and painful letter. It depends entirely upon your own wishes in the matter whether I ever write to you again. So, if this is to be my last letter, I will ask your kind forbearance ; and if not, I know that you will pardon it for the sake of the motive with which it was written.

"Kitty, must I speak plainly to you ? You have not deserved the reticence at my hands that my love for you would fain have made me show ; but let me recall the events of the last few months, and leave you to judge for yourself. You came among us, the brightest thing we had : we tried to make you happy, and succeeded, as you said ; and of us all it would be hard to say for a long time who loved you best. At length —there is no saying how these things happen—I longed to make you my wife, feeling sure that you would be happy so, and that, though much older than yourself and a widower, I could offer you an affection not altogether unworthy of your

youth, your beauty, and your gifted nature. You said that you would marry me, because you loved me ; and time wore on.

“ Why you went to Mrs Wingfield’s, why you broke your promise of returning to me, why you put me off with excuse after excuse, why you consented to spend the spring in Paris with your new friend, and why you are still with her instead of with me, are questions only your own heart can answer. How has it answered them ? How has it answered them ?

“ O Kitty ! it was consideration for you, not coldness, that kept me silent and unreproachful during those unhappy months of alternate hope and fear.

“ How could I press selfish claims upon you ? How could I recall promises that must have convicted you of ill faith towards myself ? How could I spoil your peace ? It seemed kindest to you and wisest for myself to wait.

“ And what has waiting brought me ? It has brought me no conviction of your affection for any one else—it has brought me no conviction of your indifference to myself. You say you cannot marry me—at least, you think you cannot ; but you give no valid reason for thinking thus, and without a valid reason I have no right to give you up.

“ Think of it, Kitty. You have made a promise to one who has never deceived you in anything ; who is just as deserving of such a promise now as when first you made it. Will you be true and keep it, or will you not ? It is not simply a question of marrying me ; it is a question of honour, and upon your manner of answering it depends the one faith without which life is contemptible—faith in yourself. I think it is not want of faith in me that holds you back, for you have so often said you could trust me. And you know—perhaps too well—how much I care for you, so I need not repeat that old story.

“ Do not be angry with me, dear Kitty, but remember how hard it is for any man to bear such a disappointment, especially when he is not conscious of having deserved it. I am humble enough, Heaven knows, dear, when I compare the little I have to give, and the all in all that I have to take at your

hands ; but then a man cannot do more than love with his whole heart ; and if that does not suffice for a woman, nothing will. We shall be turning our faces homeward in about a month's time, and I have decided to make another halt here on our way back from Switzerland. Address your letter plainly to Dr Norman, of Shelley, care of Herr Bran, Hôtel Adler ; it will be quite safe in the hands of my old friend here ; but do not let it arrive later than a month from this date. Your letter shall decide all.

"Prissy sends eleven kisses and her love to you. Laura seems happy in Paris. God bless you, dearest Kitty !

"Yours most truly and affectionately,

"EDWARD NORMAN."

And what did Kitty say to this letter ? It did not put her in a passion. It did not make her wholly penitent. It did not draw her nearer to her lover, or repel her from him. It brought no tears.

But it set her thinking deeply. Had Dr Norman written after Perry's strain, it would have been easy to console him with tender phrases and sweet words, that might mean anything or nothing. Had he been a shade less frank, a shade more reproachful, it would have been as easy to renounce him coldly, cruelly. As it was, his letter was so kind, so just, so manly, that she quailed before it, and felt it to be the summoning voice of a judge.

She read the letter for a second and a third time, and saw that there was no unreading its purport. It was a sort of "Stand and deliver !" from which there was no appeal. He had done with sentimental skirmishing, with pleadings and promises, with everything but the naked truth, and that he would have from her at any cost. Kitty began to think that the naked truth would have been best from the beginning—if it were only a shade less ugly !



## CHAPTER XXXI.

*LAURA'S SLIPPERS.*

DR NORMAN's letter was, in fact, like the Japanese sentence upon a traitorous nobleman, which condemns him to commit suicide after his own fashion. He had not intended to be cruel ; but poor Kitty looked tremblingly first at the cup of poison, then at the halter, then at the dagger, not knowing which punishment to choose. Meantime a month intervened between the sentence and its fulfilment, and each day of it seemed inexpressibly precious to her.

When not tormented by the thought that she must be her own fate, she felt rich, strong, glad in her sense of youth and power ! Life was a game that she played well : who can wonder that she enjoyed playing it ? People were all interesting to her, less because her humanity was superabundant than because her principle of solidarity was developed almost to the pitch of an extra sense. What were we sent on earth for, she reasoned, but to get what we haven't got, and to give others what they are in want of ? And she preached this text to herself from day to day. The question was constantly arising—Who could give her what she most wanted ? and it was uppermost in her mind now.

There was Dr Norman ready to give her all he had—honour, affection, peace ; but these did not seem enough for her. There was Perry flinging his life of love at her feet, and she could neither take it up nor wholly trample it under foot. There was Myra, who adored her after the fashion of women who must adore something, and she felt that Myra might ere long find new idols.

To whom, then, must she look ? She was rich in friends, in acquaintances, and she had one or two lovers ; with whom of all these could she make her home—if she refused to marry Dr Norman ? “ I will make him happy—I can't make myself miserable ”—this was the alternate burden of her thoughts for several days after receiving his letter.

She felt sometimes as if she should have been already married to Dr Norman, but for his goodness. The idea of having to live up to his standard had frightened her, for she knew that she was worldly, paganish, Bohemian to the back-bone, and he did not know her as she knew herself. She would most likely have been married to Perry before knowing Dr Norman but for his indifference to poverty and her dread of it. "It seems impossible to obtain exactly what we want in life," Kitty thought at last, with a sigh—"I suppose one must content one's self with an approximation to it; and where is even that to be found?"

They were to leave Fontainebleau in a few weeks' time for Germany or the Pyrenees, and Kitty longed to break up the pleasant little camp and bivouac afresh. Heine says somewhere—

"Im süßen Lied ist oft ein saurer Rheim,"

and Kitty often perceived harsh chords in the gay music of her daily life.

Myra, having lost the occupation of being in love, and involuntarily blaming Kitty for her loss, grew irritable. It was all very well for women of Kitty's calibre to look down contemptuously upon love and marriage; Kitty had intellect, and found so many things interesting; she had none, and unless Kitty amused her, she went unamused. In the first stage of their friendship they had been all in all to each other, like school girls, but by infinitesimally gradual degrees, Kitty had waxed colder.

Myra saw it, and could not forgive. She had sacrificed her lover's feelings for Kitty's sake; she was ready to do what she willed, to go whither she might choose; she cared for Kitty more than she cared for her flossy little dog, more than she cared for any of her friends or relations, perhaps more than she cared for the man whom she was half-disposed to marry; but then neither her darling dog, nor her female friends, nor her admirer, had worshipped her and petted her

as Kitty had once done. She never imagined that Kitty could get tired of worshipping, and thus was punishing her for shortcomings rather than for actual faults, though it must be admitted that Kitty was a great deal with her new friend Ella Bartelotte, and Myra often alone.

How could she remonstrate with her for showing kindness to a fragile little invalid hardly ever off the sofa? She petted and chafed secretly at losing so much of her friend's society, and wished she had not been persuaded into sending poor Captain Longley away. Kitty, too, regretted that prompt piece of Machiavelian policy, for new ambitions, with which Myra had nothing to do, were cropping up in her mind. One day when she had gone to Ella to consult with her as to their autumn trip, the girl, seeing Kitty's look of beautiful health and capacity, flushed with a feeling half of enthusiasm, half of envy—

"You animated, animating thing!" she said. "When I see you I think the Spartans were right in leaving all the sickly babies to die. What use or ornament are we in the world?"

"There are far more beautiful things than health," Kitty said, hanging over the invalid with eyes brimful of sympathy; adding, with charming frankness, "I am handsome, I know; but you have the face of an angel."

"I hate flattery; but I like to be admired by you," Ella answered. "I wonder why it is that people believe in the cant about women not admiring each other? It is quite untrue."

And then the two had a long discussion about the friendships of men for women, and of women for each other, which ended in Ella growing communicative. Ella complained of the world a good deal in that graceful spirit of eclecticism usual to invalids. Those of sound lungs and limbs say, "I don't like So-and-So;" but to persons of finer organisation it is more usual to deplore that So-and-So is not sympathetic, and that So-and-So does not possess a soul. And to how few acquaintances do eclectic ladies grant souls and sympathies?

Ella was the kindest, most tender-hearted little being in the world, who would spend an hour over the rescue of a fly drowning in cream ; but she was as bitter as Diogenes towards any one who had no eye for colour, no ear for Beethoven, or no critical appreciation of the poetry she loved. She was even harder upon what she called persons conjugated in one mood—that is to say, people of no enthusiasms, and scant ideas ; and this was not the first time that she had poured complaints into Kitty's ears of the unsympathetic or the one-mooded.

"I get so tired of living with people who have no more capacity of growing than brick walls," she said. "How happy Mrs Wingfield must be in having a friend like you ! You grow more than any one I know. I believe there isn't a day but proves a revelation of some kind to you."

Kitty's face beamed.

"I do enjoy life more than most people," she said ; "but the more one enjoys the more one criticises, that is the worst of it ; and you cannot alter circumstances so easily as you can criticise them."

"But you would hardly alter your circumstances ?" asked Ella, wistfully. "Free, strong, bright, happy, who would not be you ?"

"Oh !" Kitty cried, laughing, "one can never judge from the outside. Myra and I love each other dearly ; but we were not born to live together, that is all."

Ella would fain have learned more, but was too delicate to ask questions. She persisted in talking of Kitty and Kitty's affairs, however, till Sir George came in, who, seeing Ella quite changed from the drooping, weary thing he had left an hour ago, was ready to fall at her friend's feet. He liked Kitty, admired her splendid stature, her bright wit, her clear, asserting intellect ; and Kitty had gone a little out of her way to please him, for no explicable reasons.

She cared for Ella and Ella's surroundings, and somehow never found Sir George too tiresome, though he would discourse for hours upon books of which she knew nothing. One can forgive

much in a host who is lavish in providing pleasures. Sir George did not care how largely he spent money upon Ella's visitors, providing the daintiest musical fêtes, pic-nics, déjeuners; and Kitty of all others had aided and abetted him in catering for the daily feast, and afterwards enjoying it. So Sir George liked Kitty, and admired her too, and knew well enough that he and Ella had no more fervent admirer anywhere. With Kitty it was always "What does Sir George say?" or, "What does darling Ella think?" or, "Do you both think so—both?" looking from father to daughter appealingly.

The matter in hand was most satisfactorily settled for the time being, by Sir George promising to see one or two of Ella's physicians at once as to the quality of the baths at Ischl or at Arcachon. Kitty had discerned these places with safe enthusiasm, feeling sure that neither in the Austrian Tyrol nor in the Pyrenees, her sins, or rather her lovers, would find her out. The physician's opinion was to be conveyed to Kitty and Myra that night, and meantime they decided to leave Fontainebleau in three days. Kitty went to Paris next day to buy travelling dresses, pleased with the issue of events hitherto, and very thoughtful about the future. She had done her best to make new friends and allies from day to day, thus insuring herself against unlooked-for contingencies, and battled bravely with old affections and loves that would sometimes try for mastery. And she was certainly strengthening her outworks, and making her position stronger. Thinking of these things as she passed along the crowded Rue St Honoré, glancing in the gay shop windows from time to time, she caught sight of two faces that she knew.

It was Laura and Perry, and Perry was evidently helping Laura to choose a pair of slippers. He held two shoes in his hands, one bright and new, the other old and worn, measuring them sole to sole, as carefully as he had measured shoes for Kitty in the old days, his boyish face solemnly eager, his gold-brown hair blown about more than ever. Laura stood by, watching him with the face of a happy child.

Kitty turned away from the pretty picture, feeling suddenly

heart-sick, soul-sick. How beautiful he was, how true, how good! Yet she could not love him.

She walked hastily on, troubled with the suggestions of the scene. Surely Laura was not falling in love with Perry? Surely Mrs Cornford was not encouraging such a folly? She knew only too well that Perry was hers, heart and soul; but she could not answer for what he might do if driven to desperation. Laura and Dr Norman must be saved at any cost; and no sooner had she reached her hotel than she despatched a letter to Laura, begging her to come to the hotel early next day, without saying a word to any living soul. This was the first time she had communicated with any of her old friends in the Rue de Trévisé since the killing of the fatted calf; but she felt that it would be more than heartless to keep silent now. If she could not become Dr Norman's wife, she would at least prove his friend. The thought was consolatory.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### *IRÆ AMANTIUM, ETC.*

FOLLY is a fair supper, but a miserable breakfast. Laura and Perry met after her installation in the Rue de Trévisé with downcast eyes and sudden little blushes, looking like children who have stolen cherries and expect a whipping. Perry could not acquit himself of having aided and abetted Laura's contrivances to come; and now that she was among them, he wished himself away. What good could he do her? What good could she do him? It was sweet to have her sympathy, as it is sweet to any man to have the sympathy of a gentle, loving child-woman, and Laura's influence had really stayed Perry on the road to ruin. But if the feeling on her side should grow into something else?

So where poor Laura had looked for wells of comfort she found thirsty deserts only, and her young heart swelled with

the bitterness of indignation. She had done nothing to warrant Perry's coldness, nothing to deserve his neglect, and he seemed on the alert to be cold and neglectful. All his old tenderness of manner, half protective, half appealing, was wanting; and if by chance they were left alone together, which happened seldom, he would busy himself with a book, or talk in a constrained way about common things.

The very first opportunity that Perry could get of speaking privately to Mrs Cornford he poured out his sins, craving absolution. He knew how wrong his conduct had been in making a confidant of Laura; he knew that he could never love any woman but Kitty; he knew that he had been drawn to Laura by her child-like love and pity for him. Laura was young and able to forget; he was weak, but able to make a great effort when occasion required, and occasion required a great effort now.

"And what do all these fine speeches tend to?" asked Mrs Cornford, smiling. "You are never to be less trusted, Perry, than when you have delivered yourself of some excellent resolution, for the first thing you do is to go and break it. I know your ways. If you came to me vowing and declaring that you were over head and ears in love with little Laura and Kitty both, and must marry Laura because Kitty won't marry you, I should have some hopes of you."

"Every one is wise once in their life," Perry answered, "and I am going to be wise now. It is a horrid punishment to me to make that sweet child hate me; but she shall do that rather than"—

"Tut—tut—tut!" cried Mrs Cornford.

"Oh! you don't know how I love her," Perry said, with the utmost simplicity; then catching Mrs Cornford's convicting look, he added, "I mean, how I love Kitty."

"Oh! what a man may do, and yet not think himself an ass! Perugino, I love thee like a mother, but do not ask me to listen when thou brayest."

And Mrs Cornford drove him out of the room with her maulstick. When she heard the door of his study shut in a

loud and dignified manner, she summoned Laura, and talked to her with the oddest possible mixture of motherly wisdom and vagabondish experience—the long and short of her sermon being, as far as Laura could gather it, that men were donkeys, that women were fools, and that Perry and Laura excelled the rest of their kind in folly.

Poor Laura ! she found the Rue de Trévisé very far from the paradise she expected it to be, and heartily wished herself in Switzerland with her father and little Prissy. The weather was almost tropical, and she felt scarcely able to breathe in the stuffy little rooms, always smelling of oil-colour and onions. Sometimes the little girls took her for long walks into the Parc Monceux and the Bois ; but there was no fresh air to be had anywhere, and she wearied of their boisterous ways. Perry was always painting, either in his studio or in the galleries, and they only met at the little untidy, savoury dinners that he swallowed voraciously.

At length the clouds broke and Laura caught a glimpse of blue sky again. It happened quite unexpectedly ; for Perry, in some sudden freak of imagined prosperity, took a box at the opera for all the ladies, and Laura wanted new shoes fit to wear with a white frock.

"Oh ! bother the shoes !" cried Mrs Cornford, forgetting all her prudence in the excitement of anticipating an opera. "Well, the chicks are busy washing their muslin frocks, so Perry must take you, as your papa doesn't permit you to go about alone."

And then she called Perry down, and put Laura under his protection, with many secret admonitions.

"How hot it is !" began Laura, petulantly. "Doesn't the glare make you feel nearly blind ? I do."

"Take my arm, and I will hold up the umbrella over us both," said Perry ; and Laura obeyed, feeling ready to cry at the words, though they were hardly wonderful. They had not walked far before Perry felt impelled to make some foolish speech or other that made Laura's round eyes fill, and the corners of her sweet mouth go down. "Oh !" thought Perry,

"what can be so innocent as the sort of friendship existing between her and me?" And then he went on to console her, and to explain what he termed his abominable behaviour of the last few days. "The fact is," he said, "I am such a dreadfully weak-minded creature, that I do exactly what people tell me to do, and Mrs Cornford said that it was wrong for us two to be friends ; she said that your papa would not like it."

"I know what Mrs Cornford says," Laura began, tremulously ; "but so long as we feel that a thing is not wrong in itself, I don't think it much matters whether other people approve or no—do you?"

"Of course not," Perry answered ; "and Mrs Cornford knows well enough what a consolation your friendship has been to me. But, Laura, you are too young and too good to be in the confidence of a wretch like me. I can't keep from drinking, from bad company, from the gambling-table—there, it is all out. I am headlong on the road to ruin, and neither God nor angels, good or bad, can save me. In a year's time I shall be dead, murdered by Kitty. I shan't leave a sou to bury me, and shall be flung into a pauper's grave at Montmartre."

"Oh!" cried Laura, weeping ; "If I—if anybody could do you good and make you happy!"

"You are an angel to say so! But no one, nothing can do me good. I am a hopeless, helpless, doomed fool, that's what I am."

"I wish I could hate her," cried little Laura, vehemently ; "she deserves it."

"Hate her!" cried Perry. "If she ground one to powder, one's dust would find a tongue to say, 'I love Kitty.' That's the worst of it. If I could hate her, I would do so this moment. It seems such a shame not to be happy at my age."

Thus they prattled on like the children they were, and Laura thought that she would willingly quarrel again with Perry, since the recollection was so sweet. He helped her to choose a pretty pair of shoes, and then they returned home, both unconscious of Kitty's passing recognition.

When Laura reached home, she found Kitty's letter awaiting

her. The address had been written by Fran<sup>c</sup>ine (who accompanied her mistress to Paris), and, to make secrecy doubly sure, Kitty had enclosed a milliner's card, writing inside the envelope, "PRIVATE, K. S."

Laura therefore pocketed the unsuspected missive, and read it when she found herself alone.

Kitty in Paris! Kitty wishing to see her! and only her! She hardly knew how to keep the astounding surprise to herself, and was thinking of it all the evening. Perry, too, was filled with thoughts of Kitty.

What was Gounod's music? what was a prima donna? what was all the world to these two compared with Kitty? Had the emperor been assassinated then and there, they would have thought much more about her than about the headless French empire. They were in the Byronic period of their lives, when all of us act the part of fakirs, doing penance and committing elaborate follies for some fetish whom we find out later to be a very poor creature indeed, and not at all worth tormenting ourselves about.

Laura, having framed an errand, took a fiacre and went, wondering whether she should be courageous enough to plead Perry's cause. After waiting nearly an hour, as all Kitty's slaves of the lamp had to do, in she came, this queen, this goddess, this Helen of two or three Troys, this Cleopatra of so many Antonys. She was richly dressed after French fashion, and bore with her the indescribable atmosphere of a soft, elegant, pampered life. Her hands were so white, her hair so glossy, the little lace-bordered pocket-handkerchief stuck in her girdle so perfumed, her skirt so long and stately, that Laura felt humbled and abashed, and had not a word to say.

But she was in Kitty's arms, caught to Kitty's heart, kissed by Kitty's lips, ere any words were said; and when the greeting was over Kitty herself spoke—

"How good it is to see you again!" she said, caressing the child as a mother might have done a little daughter long lost sight of.

"Oh! how good it is to see you again! And you are more

beautiful than ever," cried Laura, lost in childlike admiration of the costly clothes that seemed emanations of Kitty's self.

Kitty sighed and looked contemptuous.

"I liked the cheap blue muslin gown I used to wear at Shelley church much better," she said. "But I did not send for you to talk of my clothes; I want to talk of yourself." Then, looking into Laura's eyes with tender scrutiny, she added—"I saw you with Mr Neeve yesterday."

Laura became rosy red in a moment.

"We only went to buy some shoes," she said.

"But what business had Mr Neeve with your shoes?"

"Papa does not like me to walk about Paris alone, and every one else was busy, and that is why Mr Neeve went."

"Is that all?" asked Kitty, still tenderly inquisitorial. "You must have no secrets from me, Laura."

Thus urged, Laura told her story—and a touching story it was, having for its theme and burden, the love of Perry and of herself for this cruel, kind, good, naughty, tender, pitiless creature called Kitty.

"We never talk of anything else," Laura said, with charming pathos, "and I think we could talk of you all day long. Oh, Kitty, he has painted such beautiful pictures lately! I am sure he will become a great artist like Murillo or Raffaelle one day, and you know artists do make fortunes if they are clever."

Kitty understood very well what Laura meant by this little speech, but looked as innocent as a baby.

"My dear child," she said, "artists are the greatest dreamers on the face of the earth, and Mr Neeve the greatest of all. But that does not matter now. I know I am always causing pain to those I love, though I do love you, Laura, and I do want to act the part of a friend towards you. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into a friendship with Perry Neeve. He has a sweet nature, and is the most gifted creature I know"—she coloured and stammered a little—"but—but there are reasons why you should not make a friend of him. You are too young and he is too young for that, and then there is your father to consider."

Laura hung her head like a scolded child, and Kitty went on, alternately chiding and consoling. Laura must not listen to Perry's confidences, because it was unwise and unmaidenly; Laura must not be persuaded into any foolish compact of friendship with him, because Dr Norman would not approve; lastly, Laura must not dream of allying herself permanently with Mrs Cornford's set, because of *les convenances*, as Kitty put it.

"You see, my darling," Kitty said, "how ill unequal friendships have answered in my own case. Ambition, and," she added, modestly, "I may say, the tastes inherited with gentle blood, first led me into bettering my condition in life; but at what a cost! Am I not a traitor in the eyes of every one who knows me, and an ungrateful wretch in my own? I cannot go back to Mrs Cornford; and I hate myself for what I am and what I do; and yet, being what I am, I cannot help it. O Laura, be warned by me—you must promise to be warned by me."

She wound her arms round the young girl's neck in a vehement passion of entreaty, that would have swayed a much stronger will than Laura's, and never left off coaxing or pressing till the word of promise was said. Laura consented to abjure Perry's friendship, to hear no more of his confidence, to return to her father as soon as opportunity offered, and to study his wishes in everything.

And when she had pledged herself to all this, she received a goodly reward—such a reward as only Kitty could give; sweet special words of tenderness, lofty confidences, insinuating little bits of praise, and lastly, a little ring from off her own finger.

"That is a pledge," she said, "that my little Laura is not going to make all those belonging to her unhappy, and herself too, by doing imprudent things."

And then she kissed her for the last time, and said she feared she must send her away.

"And when shall I see you again?" asked Laura, wistfully.

"How can I tell, dear? This is a flying visit to Paris, on

my part, from our head-quarters, and we shall start for some far-off place of resort in a day or two, most likely at half an hour's notice ; at present it is quite uncertain whither we go. But I will write to you wherever I am—as if I should not ! —and, mind, no word of this meeting to anybody."

Laura returned home with a dreary foreboding of Perry's vexation in the future. What would Perry say, when she should reject his friendship and not be able to tell him why ?

This Kitty they all adored made them very miserable.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

It must be confessed that Kitty made the problem of life unnecessarily difficult. She was now entangling herself with the Bartelottes, although already entangled past extrication with all those whom she had known before, and who had loved her up till now. By some singular and fatal quality of character, she seemed unable to lead a simple existence, but must complicate it by all sorts of unprovoked and irrevocable acts. For instance, no sooner was it settled that she and Myra should go with the Bartelottes to the Pyrenees, than she threw herself with such heart and soul into Ella's interests, that Myra grew savagely jealous. Kitty felt a warm liking for Ella, but after all they were mere acquaintances, and there could be no reason for the voluntary slavery into which Kitty sold herself for her new idol. She did a hundred things a day that a less exacting nature than Myra's might have resented—giving Ella her morning leisure, her companionship, her sparkling talk, her bright spirits, all of which belonged to Myra by right of compact.

And why did Kitty do this ?

She could hardly have answered the question. Myra's ill humour made her wretched, and she was put to every imaginable shift that her feelings might be spared when possible. Yet she went her ways with apparent recklessness, never putting

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"off with the old love before she put on the new," sparing herself as little as she spared those who had once been the apple of her eye.

Why did she do it?

She accumulated small troubles from day to day by every new friendship, she had a burden of unfulfilled pledges upon her conscience, she subjected herself to reproach after reproach, and yet she went her ways unrepenting. Had she been arraigned before a tribunal, she might have made out for herself some such case as the following :—

"It is not I who am to blame, but society. Does not society teach every nineteenth-century woman that old things have passed away, and all things are becoming new? Does not society make refinement the shibboleth of all those who would live and not merely exist? Marriage can no longer be said to be the Alpha and Omega of a woman's life; and the era of convents has passed away. Therefore hundreds of thousands of us are thrown upon our own resources, and outsiders blame us because we are guilty of precedents. Some of us rush into the world's market, crying, 'Man's work, at any wages,' and get it, whether they do it ill or well; and thus obtain a little more freedom, a little more money, and a little more refinement. In former days, an unmarried woman of the middle or upper classes was content to hang, like a parasite, upon some branch of the family tree; but now she finds that she can in every way improve her condition by earning wages. What am I doing that other women do not do? Only, being uneducated, I have to make my way by the simple force of character. I don't want to marry a poor man, and have to rear a large number of children; I am sure that I am intended for more ambitious things; and is not society teaching the more intelligent of my sex that, as the number of women exceed those of men, marriage is not to be depended upon by all as the *summum bonum* of life?"

Kitty did, in truth, say to herself that, being neither a domestic creature, nor a musician, nor an artist, nor a philanthropist, nor a student, she must just use such gifts as she

possessed, which were, ready wit, immeasurable tact, and a supreme gift at reading and handling character. If these gifts led her into difficulties and delinquencies, it was little wonder, she thought, and little matter for self-condemnation. Being born a nineteenth-century woman, she must be a power somehow, and she made herself a power with a vengeance. But friendship is a dangerous thing when made a trade of, and so Kitty had found to her cost, from the time of leaving Paradise Place until now. Friendship is pleasant enough so long as it is put to legitimate use, and she had been happy in her friendship of old days with the little violinist Petroffsky and the Fulham set. It was only within the last year that she had become a snob, catching the skirts of people standing on a higher step of the social ladder than herself, saying, "Lift me up!" And she was daily paying the penalty of her ambition.

For instance, here she was at Fontainebleau, in the glorious summer-tide, and she could not listen to the passionate cantatas of the thrush, or drowse with the noontide bee under fretted roofs of virginal green, without being troubled about worldly things.

What would become of her if, or rather when, Myra married? Might not Ella be a powerful friend?—Ella, who was sole mistress of a wealthy house—Ella, who was so dependent upon those she loved, and who said that she loved her—Ella, who possessed wealth she could not use, servants for whom she could hardly find employment, luxuries she could only enjoy vicariously? Moreover, Ella's mode and condition of life were very unlikely to alter. Who so likely to value Kitty for Kitty's self as she?

And how pleasant it would be to spend the winters at Cannes or Nice, the springs in a mansion in Belgravia, the autumns in an ancestral country-seat, with an undulating deer-park around it, and enjoy all sorts of pomps and pleasures hitherto undreamed-of! Myra had become rich by marrying a wealthy Anglo-Indian, and had no position anywhere beyond that which wealth and fair breeding gave anybody; and then—Kitty tacked this proviso to every worldly-minded speculation

as a salve to her conscience—"Myra, by mooting marriage, has declared her intention of forsaking me, before I dreamed of forsaking her."

It was now arranged that they would go altogether to Arcachon, and things might have gone smoothly enough but for Kitty's unfortunate propensity to run into extremes. Had she stood by Myra in everything, thus losing her hold on Ella's affection, and perhaps vexing Sir George a little, all might have gone well; but as it was, she must try her old game of serving two masters, and live from time to time on the verge of a terrible crisis. The crisis was staved off till the eve of departure, when a most lucky circumstance—for Kitty—occurred, and the Gordian knot was beautifully clipped on a sudden.

Myra was one of those fortunate persons to whom people were always leaving money, without any other rhyme or reason than relationship. She had more than enough for her needs already, and did nothing to deserve substantial remembrance at the hands of uncles, aunts, and cousins, and yet they could not make their wills without adding to her fortune. So Myra, just as she was going off to the Pyrenees to enjoy herself, must be sent for to England, because some horridly provoking relation had seen fit to leave her a handsome sum in the Consols, and family complications of a business nature made her presence necessary.

"It's too bad," she said, pouting and crying like a child, "that I should be dragged to London at this time of the year, and be disappointed of all my pleasure. No, Kitty, I won't go."

"Oh, what nonsense!" Kitty said, with a genuine laugh; "as if a legacy came every day."

"How good of you to bear it so patiently, when I am sure your heart is quite set upon Arcachon! But you shall have your reward."

Kitty looked grave.

"I don't quite see how we can both go," she said. "Think how entirely the Bartelottes have relied upon us, and Ella so helpless too! It would not be fair to them."

"If you go to Arcachon, I go," Myra said, decidedly.

"My dear Myra"—

"If you go to Arcachon, I go," reiterated the little lady.

"But just consider the way in which we have pledged ourselves," Kitty pleaded. "Ella would never have thought of Arcachon, or, indeed, of any other place, without some capable friends at hand, and for both of us to fail her in the eleventh hour, when there isn't an available soul left in Paris, would be too unkind. Your stay in England need be but short, and I would meet you at Bourdeaux, or at Tours, or even at Paris," she added, very sweetly.

"You propose, then, to sacrifice me in order that Ella may not pout a little while, or Sir George be made cross for half an hour."

Kitty became pale and silent. For a time Myra was silent too. At length she said, with passionate tears and quivering lips—

"Of course, I don't want you to feel conventionally bound to me—I'm not so mean as that, but I did think that you cared for me a little, Kitty."

Kitty would fain have taken her hands and caressed her into a gentler mood, but Myra put her away, and refused to listen when she began speaking in self-justification.

She stamped her little foot and clenched her little hand in an anguish of mortification that was quite real, and gave vent, between her tears, to one or two speeches like the following :—

"How can women be such fools as to trust each other? I was only a school-girl when I made up my mind never to have friends, because I saw what friendship led to; but somehow you forced me into liking you, Kitty, and when I began, I could not leave off. It will end in my hating you, that is all. Perhaps you won't mind even that, when you have your new friends all to yourself, and are leading a different sort of life. You won't think much about my loneliness either. Why should you, any more than you thought of Dr Norman's, or of Mr Perugino's?—and men always get better treated. But of what use for me to rant and rave? Hard words won't move you,

and crying won't move you, and plain truth won't move you, or I might say what your conduct looks like, and is, in the eyes of every just person."

"You speak as if I had determined upon quitting you for ever," Kitty said, with a calm smile. "Dear Myra, your absence in England need not extend beyond a week, and you will then find me—not with the Bartelottes—but awaiting you in your own house. Nothing of the programme is to be changed, except that you will join us a few days later; and if it were not for poor Ella's helplessness, I should not dream of going with them."

"Ella less helpless than I am!" Myra said, petulantly. "She has twice as much cleverness and twice as many servants! I am sure to be cheated or sent on to the wrong place by that dear stupid Tom-Tom and the boy Walter."

"But, after all, we may be fighting with shadows. If the Bartelottes would only stay here a week longer, all the difficulties would vanish," Kitty said, brightly; "and you must know that if I were to go with them, it would be solely as your representative, and putting other considerations out of the question utterly"—

"All other considerations?" said Myra, bitterly.

"O you jealous, wayward thing!" cried Kitty, seating herself on a low stool at her friend's feet, and looking up into her face with an irresistibly fond, though fault-finding smile. "You must not say such things, for you do not mean them, I know. As if I cared for Ella as much as I do for you, my more than sister, my benefactor, my patroness."

"But if you care for me so much, why do you dream for a moment of letting me go to England alone?"

"Dearest," began Kitty, "is not every one obliged sometimes to sacrifice feelings to the exigencies of society?—but I am always preaching on this text, and the more I preach the less you seem to listen. In plain English, we are pledged to Sir George and Ella."

And she went on with her casuistry till Myra consented that Kitty should go to Arcachon, and not only consented, but acknowledged the necessity of it.

Having obtained this concession, Kitty proceeded to instruct Myra's servants, Walter, Tom-Tom, and her maid, as to the care of their mistress on the journey, and to make all sorts of fanciful preparations for her comfort, cramming her pockets with bonbons, her bag with new novels, her trunk with all sorts of things that she persisted in considering necessary. It was arranged that Kitty should meet Myra at Tours on her return, and that they should write to each other at least twice a week. Kitty smiled and scoffed at the merest insinuation of her part of the compact being broken ; and after a time Myra believed her, and presented her with a costly diamond and ruby ring, as a pledge of good faith and friendship.

Then came the hurried lunch, the drive to the station, the leave-taking, and, when the train was fairly on its way to Boulogne, Kitty breathed a great sigh of relief. She was fond of Myra, and she wished to save her pain, but she felt very glad to have her away for a time.

One Gordian knot was at least untied. Who could tell what happy interventions might render the others as easy in the untying ?

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

ARCACHON is the quaintest place in the world, with a little village of lodging-houses, built like pagodas, forests of little pine-trees, little walks and drives about a little lake, and a climate of such soporific quality as to produce a kind of mental torpor upon all tourists who go there. So soporific, indeed, is the pine-scented air, that one would be inclined to think an assassin might forget the murder on his conscience, a philanthropist his schemes, an author his critics, whilst breathing it. And Kitty Silver indeed forgot the friends and lovers to whom she was bound.

She was enjoying a sense of freedom as new as it was delightful. Sir George and Ella treated her as if she were a

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duchess. It was always, "Would Miss Silver like this? Would Miss Silver object to that? Did Miss Silver wish to visit such and such a place?" Every arrangement seemed made with regard to her pleasure, and, beyond a little care of Ella, she was absolutely free from any responsibility whatever. All this kindness, this hospitality, this consideration, came spontaneously and unsought. She sat down to rich feasts, mental as well as material, every day, with the assurance of being a welcome and honoured guest, and she had never before found herself under precisely the same circumstances.

Had she not purchased all the pleasant things of Shelley House with the coin of innumerable daily services? Had she not richly paid Myra for all the good things of her giving—acting by turns as housekeeper, secretary, butler, milliner? How often had she gone to bed sick and weary with the efforts of the day, commiserating herself and envying every one else in the world?

Here life was easy beyond her imagination. She had nothing to do but to enjoy herself all day long, and she flourished on such liberal diet, looking so handsome in her pretty, country costume, that it was a pleasure to behold her.

She never seemed to remember that she was handsome, which made people more ready to praise her good looks. And, in fact, so busy was she with all sorts of plans and problems, that she had very little time to think about her personal appearance.

"How beautiful you are!" Ella was always saying. "How handsome and clever that girl is, by Jove!" was Sir George always thinking; and between the two Kitty got as much praise as was good for her. Praise is, no doubt, a great personal beautifier, so long as it is kept within legitimate bounds, just as continuous undeserved blame makes people grow cross and ugly. Kitty could hardly help smiling and looking bright when she saw her smiles and bright looks reflected in other faces; and her new friends were most appreciative. They appreciated Kitty for her real self, finding her fresh way of looking at things in general especially

refreshing to persons like themselves, whose experiences were limited to one phase of society. Kitty forgot sometimes that she was no longer the Kitty of Paradise Place, and would impulsively give way to piquant little witticisms that were hardly refined. She would blush a delicious rose-colour when the deed was done, and say very meekly—

“What have I said?—but that comes of living among authors and artists, you know. One can’t help imbibing slang.”

Her Protean idiosyncrasy came out astoundingly. Sir George was a bibliomaniac; and what, in Heaven’s name, could Kitty know about old books? But Kitty was not one of those who “eyes have they and see not, ears have they and hear not.” She had lived in Bohemia, and Bohemia boasts of its bibliomaniacs too. She remembered how upon one occasion—it was in her childhood—there had been a struggle of many days between the universal bibliomania and—starvation. Perry’s father possessed a rare black-letter Bible, which he adored almost beyond his little curly-headed lad of nine years; but the little curly-headed lad was in rags, and poor Polly Cornford had to bury her husband, and Kitty herself, a wild-eyed gipsy of nine years, too, was lying sick with measles, and duns were at the door.

Poor old Perugino held out till the entreaties and reproaches of the women—not Polly Cornford, mind you—were too much for him, then, very meekly and sadly, carried off his beloved black-letter, and brought home forty pounds in exchange; and Mr Cornford was buried, and poor little Perry was fed and clothed, and Kitty was provided with wine, and every one rejoiced, except old Perugino.

Kitty remembered this, and racked her brains for other half-forgotten facts about books, in order that Sir George might find her conversant with his hobby. She told him of such and such a place in Paris, and such and such a place in London, where he would not fail to discover treasures; and discussed booksellers, editions, bindings, catalogues, till Sir George was in a seventh heaven, and thought Ella’s friend

by far the most superior-minded young lady of their acquaintance.

"It is so good of you to interest yourself about papa's book mania," Ella would say. "You know it bores other people dreadfully, especially young people. I cannot think how it is that nothing in the world seems to bore you."

"Could I find anything to bore me here, I should be a captious wretch, not fit to live," Kitty answered, demurely.

"But tell me honestly, dear—do you like old books?"

"I do, indeed. You know, my childhood was spent among scholarly people, and I am interested in everything they liked."

"How fortunate for papa—and for me!" Ella said, smiling archly, "for, with the best intentions in the world, we are dull company for each other sometimes"—she added, with a sigh. "I often think papa must be an angel to bear being tied to a fretful invalid as he does. He is unpopular, generally speaking, and many domestic matters have helped to sour his temper; but you see how good and kind and unselfish he is at home."

"Quite an angel," Kitty said, smiling; "only angels haven't black beards."

Ella laughed, and said that her father's beard was the only personal vanity he had; adding—

"Papa detests a handsome man as much as he admires a handsome woman. Those amusing men at Fontainebleau were not handsome, or he would never have tolerated them."

And they talked away merrily, as was their wont to do, never finding the pine woods, or the pagodas, or the little lake monotonous, and growing more intimate every day.

It was a happy, oblivious time, and Kitty wished that it might last for ever. The sword of Damocles, in the shape of Dr Norman's letter, was always hanging over her, but she persisted in not seeing it. She would not recognise the evil hour till it had come.

When she first arrived at Arcachon there remained exactly twenty-one days' respite, and twenty-one days pass quickly under pleasant circumstances. From the dewy, pine-scented, bird-singing morning, till the luminous, tranquil, southern

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night, there was nothing to do at Arcachon but to enjoy existence. They had drives, they lounged over novels under the orange trees, they made delightfully easy little excursions, they were idle to the pitch of idiocy ; and how delicious such idleness was ! What indeed is so delicious as idleness in a foreign land with plenty of sunshine ?

Kitty's twenty-one days passed like a dream, out of which she awoke one morning to find herself utterly dismayed. She had counted the time that must elapse between the sending of her letter and the arrival of it, and she knew that she must write to Dr Norman within the next four-and-twenty hours. The early half of the time was not insupportable. It is so easy to forget at mid-day that one has to swallow an unpleasant potion at midnight ; and Kitty drove out with Ella, sauntered about the garden with Sir George, enjoyed her noontide siesta, and dined as usual. But all these things came to an end, and she found herself at last shut up in her own room, pen in hand —Dr Norman's letter lying before her, and her mind full of irresolution, penitence, and dismay. She sat down, and calmly reviewed the state of her affairs, moral and material.

One point was clear—she stood bound to Dr Norman ; and another was equally so—her friendship for Dr Norman was the only safe investment she had hitherto made. Myra loved her ; but Myra was ready to marry any day without considering her friend's welfare. Ella loved her ; but Ella was not an easy person to know intimately ; and beyond a delightful acquaintance, what was Ella to her ? If Myra forsook her, if no one else took her up, should she not be fairly worsted in the battle of life ?

It seemed to Kitty that duty and expediency ran here in parallel lines, and that if the former stood Dr Norman in good stead, so much more did the latter. Compassion also inclined her to him. Some persons in Kitty's condition would have lost sight of all but Dr Norman's salient grievances ; but she had a mental visage of extraordinary clearness, and here, far away at Arcachon, could see how every detail of his good, earnest life would be influenced by her decision.

All the softness and ease and elegance of the existence she had been leading of late, all the influence of Ella's refined nature, inclined her more kindly towards Dr Norman now. All the outlying troubles, that seemed gathering like a snow-ball, inclined her more kindly towards him. She never wanted less to go back to the hum-drum country life that she knew would be her portion as his wife ; but Ella was making her good, and she dreaded to do a wantonly wicked, unwomanly thing.

The clock of the little church struck eleven, twelve, one, and Kitty knew no more what the purport of her letter was to be than she had done in the morning. She dipped her pen in the ink, and, having dated the letter, began desperately—

“ My dear Dr Norman.”

But as soon as that was done, she rose in desperate indecision, and walked up and down the room, sighing to herself. Perhaps, had she felt morally certain that if she broke off with Dr Norman then and there, she should be no more reminded of him, and no more brought into contact with anybody belonging to him, she could have sat down at once and ended the misery.

“ If only some one, if only something would help me,” she said to herself as she turned about the paper, unwilling to write the death-warrant of her best friend’s happiness. Once she stopped, and wrote the following sentence to see how the truth looked on paper. “ Oh ! forgive me. I must be false to you. Forget the wretch that I am ! ” But no sooner were the words written than she held the paper to the candle, and destroyed the horrid symbols that they were. She cared for Dr Norman’s good opinions, for her own self-respect, too much to prove herself a liar ; but then the cost of being true ! —to go back to the hum-drum village life ; to take upon herself the charge of those wilful children ; to respond to Dr Norman’s noble, honest, large-hearted life and love—could she do all these at all, much less do them well ?

And then there was Perry !

She threw herself on the bed in a paganish impatience with the Fates that had brought her into such straits, craving in

her poor blind humanity a Deity to pray to, or a second self to give help and counsel.

As Kitty lay thus, wondering if this were the kind of ordeal to make people become pinched, and old, and ugly, she glided from the stupor of despondency into the stupor of sleep.

During that state of imperfect slumber she dreamed, or thought she dreamed, that she was drowsing on the old sofa in Paradise Place, sitting up to let in Perry and Mrs Cornford, who had gone to the theatre. Kitty and Mrs Cornford used to take it by turns to go with him, when the ticket of admission was only a double one, and it was Perry's custom to signify their return by throwing a pebble against the casement, or singing a snatch of a song. How real Kitty's dream seemed to be! There was Perry outside singing—

“Oh! had I a thousand a year, Gaffer Green :”

and then there came the impatient shower of gravel against the panes.

“Oh! wait a minute,” she cried, starting up impatiently; but the action roused her, and she laid her head on the pillow almost wishing that the dream were true. And it was true, in a sense, for the singing and the shower did not cease, though Kitty remained wakeful; and when she rose from her bed to peer out, there was a wild Quixotic figure, Perry's self, keeping watch beneath the window!

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

THERE was no time for thinking. He had found her out. She must accord him an interview at any risk. Foolish, fond, never-to-be-forgiven Perry!

By a great effort she controlled the passion of terror and indignation that had taken possession of her, and opening the window, said, all in a breath—

“You must be mad to think we can recognise each other

here. Am I not a lady ? have I not a reputation ? do you want me to hate you, that you persecute me thus ? But I will meet you at Bourdeaux to-morrow, and hear all that you have to say, if you promise me three things."

"A hundred, if you like," came up Perry's answer from the garden. "See you, I must and will."

"You will promise never to come near this house again?"

"Well?"

"You will promise to enter into no communication, either by interview or by writing, with Sir George or Miss Bartelotte?"

"Good. And now for request number three?"

"You will promise to behave like a rational being to-morrow, and not refer at all to the engagement that once existed between us ?"

"Kitty," cried Perry, with mock solemnity, "what you ask of me is nothing in comparison to the sacrifices I am ready to make for you. Throw me down the Testament, or the Koran, or the Talmud, and I will swear to obey to the letter."

"I will trust your word," Kitty said ; "and I will meet you at the Hôtel de la Paix to-morrow, exactly at eleven o'clock. Good night."

"One word," pleaded Perry, with pathetic passion in his voice ; but Kitty shut the window and fastened the shutters resolutely. When she felt once more alone, she could have cried with mortification and dismay ; all her feelings of compassion for Dr Norman had died out, and she sat down to write to him in a mood that was half retributive and half revengeful. What right had Dr Norman—what right had Perry to make her so suffer ? Was she not free to choose her own life, and select from all the affections held out to her the one she found sweetest and best ? Why was she to be hunted down just because she happened to be brighter, wittier, more attractive than most other women ; and goaded, netted, entangled, like any helpless dumb animal ? Poor Kitty, it must be confessed, had no idea of any higher duty than inclination. Inclination was her religion, her law, her judge ; and inclination no longer pleaded in behalf of Dr Norman.

Perry's unexpected appearance had caused a reaction, but not a reaction favourable to her absent lover. In plain English, Kitty's sentimentalism went flying to the four winds, and a fit of genuine ill-temper took its place. She was eminently an amiable person when worldly things went tolerably well with her; and she looked upon fits of ill humour much as other people look upon fits of intemperance, kleptomania, or any other vice. She hated it, and yet could not fight it off.

So, visiting Perry's sins upon Dr Norman's head, she sat down to write to him in a state of mind which could but argue ill both for the manner and matter of her letter. What she wrote, she could not precisely remember afterwards; she only knew that her meaning was worded as plainly as could be, and that it was the utter defeat of Dr Norman's hopes. For once in her life she had written nothing but the naked, unvarnished truth; how he would receive it was an after and secondary thought. Then she sealed her letter savagely, and creeping downstairs, placed it beside the letter-bag, already locked in readiness for the early post.

Kitty had a power of voluntary forgetfulness, which is most enviable in these feverish, overworked times. She could force herself to sentence one lover to a humiliating disappointment, and to make a dangerous assignation with another, without keeping awake after it. Her mind was not yet made up as to the safest means of carrying her plan into effect; but she knew that to begin to think was to go on thinking, so she shut up the faculties of her mind, as one shuts up trinkets in a drawer, and slept soundly till dawn.

Over the process of dressing she determined upon the wisest conduct to pursue: she would feign to receive a letter from some old friend passing through Bourdeaux, or, if the letter-bag were opened before Sir George or Ella, and there were no letters for her at all, she would feign to have received some such letter a day or two since. To coax Sir George into keeping Ella company, to coax both into faith in her story, would not, she thought, be difficult. As luck would have it, a letter did come to her from Bourdeaux that day—a tradesman's letter

merely—relating to some purchases she had made for Myra ; but who was to know that ? She let her tête-à-tête breakfast with Sir George draw to an end, and just as he began to talk of the day's plans, said—

“ I am most annoyingly obliged to take the half-past nine o'clock train to Bourdeaux this morning ; if you will stay with Ella, perhaps she will not mind.”

“ I have a great mind to go with you,” Sir George said. “ I want to see what the booksellers have there.”

Kitty looked up with a sweet, deprecating smile.

“ Much as I should like your escort, I will not accept it,” she answered. “ Without you, without me, for a livelong day, what would darling Ella do ? ”

“ You are right—as you always are. People may come, and she may not be feeling well, or a dozen things may happen. And now I think of it, I asked Colonel Johnson and his fellow-traveller to drop in to lunch. Must you go to-day ? ”

“ I am afraid so.”

“ Some important shopping on hand ? ” said Sir George, quizzically. He was profoundly inquisitive.

“ No. I go to meet a friend there who is passing through Bourdeaux on his way—to Spain, I presume,” Kitty answered, hypothetically ; adding with a smile, “ he is a poor young artist—a protégé of mine, I might say (oh ! happy Kitty, to have hit upon that innocent word), and if I refuse to go and see him, he would feel greatly hurt.”

“ Ask him to come here.”

“ You are very good ! ” Kitty said ; “ but he might want to come again, and that would be troublesome ; whereas, if I go to Bourdeaux with Françine, and have half-an-hour's talk with him, the matter will be ended for once and for all.”

Sir George acquiesced, and, with a very faint show of well-bred surprise, Ella acquiesced also. Neither of them liked the idea of losing Kitty—the sun of their universe—for a whole day, and there was a little feeling of jealousy underlying the regret. Who was this all-important protégé, for whom she gave up a luncheon-party as rigidly as if she were a lawyer.

bound to Bourdeaux to make the will of a dying person. It seemed incredible that a poor wandering art-student—a mere boy, as they gleaned from Kitty's reports—should exact such excessive considerations of punctuality from her. Could he not have waited? Could he not have come?

Whilst Kitty was making out her case, Sir George and Ella saw matters in the light that she wished them to do; so subtly could she force the reasoning powers of another into a focus of any compass she liked. She had said with the utmost simplicity, "I must go to Bourdeaux to see a poor young artist, a protégé of mine, and I must go to-day," and there seemed no possible objection to make to either statement. But no sooner were her personal persuasions withdrawn, than their faculties gradually sharpened, and they perceived that the circumstance was pregnant with suggestion, and—they could not conceal the thought from each other—suspicion also.

"Our dear Kitty is so generous, and so full of sympathy and affection, that I could never be quite sure into what imprudence she might not be led," said Ella; "and Mrs Wingfield used to talk of her lovers as if they were legion."

"Of course, of course," said Sir George, a little testily, feeling envious just then of younger men in general, and of Kitty's lovers in particular. "A woman like Miss Silver has lovers whether she is rich or poor—the daughter of a peer or of a sweep. What a figure she has! and what wit! She is superb!"

"Don't fall in love with Kitty yourself, papa," Ella added, joking; "for generous as she is, and sweet and loving as she is, she cannot marry all her lovers"—adding archly, "and I don't want a step-mamma—though I adore Kitty."

Sir George seemed somewhat shocked at Ella's levity.

"My dear," he said, "you forget that you and I have not a shilling to spare, and that I wouldn't spoil your comfort if Miss Silver had a million . . . and I were as much in love with her . . . as Tyrrell is in love with you."

Ella laughed sarcastically.

"I hope your passion would be to better purpose, though I doubt it," she said. "I believe Kitty might be led into follies and complications by exaggerated notions of kindness, but she is as far from falling in love as I am—and that is saying a great deal."

"You will never marry, Ella?"

"Papa, how preposterous is the very idea! And that brings us back to Kitty. A woman who renounces marriage, as I do, must seek for compensation in friendship. I cannot tell you what it would be to me now to lose the friend I have found in Kitty Silver."

"There is no present danger of that kind that I see," Sir George said. "Miss Kitty Silver likes us, and likes our ways. She will not go yet."

"We have no kind of claim upon her time, remember, papa," Ella said; "but it is not the idea of losing Kitty for the present that makes me uneasy. It is the future I am thinking of. Supposing Kitty holds herself free to accept a home with us instead of returning to Mrs Wingfield—of course, I do not know how matters stand with them, and speak hypothetically—would you offer any objection to such an arrangement?"

Sir George looked like a man who is suddenly asked to lend his dearest friend a large sum of money.

"She is a poor clergyman's daughter, or something of that sort, isn't she? and has been a governess. We should have to pay her at least a hundred a year."

"Poor papa!" cried Ella, laughing heartily at this display of her father's little weakness; "poor, victimised papa! it is too bad to come down upon you with such expensive whims; but if Kitty is to be had at any price, I must have her—always supposing Kitty to be all and no more than we take her to be."

"There is just a dash of artistic Bohemia about her," said Sir George, "that makes me feel a little uncertain whether 'Love me, love my friends,' would apply in her case;" and then he stopped short, and looked at Ella earnestly.

"Exactly," answered Ella; "but how are we ever to obtain certainty? Mrs Wingfield is the only friend of Kitty's we

know, and she is a gentlewoman, though sadly destitute of brains and education. We couldn't go to her for 'references' of her most intimate friend?"

"Will it not be better to leave matters as they are for the present?" asked her father, unwilling to spend an extra hundred a year, even to secure the society of a young, handsome, and gifted woman.

And for the present the matter was allowed to rest.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### *KITTY AND HER PROTÉGÉ.*

No sooner did Kitty find herself alone with Francine, on her way to Bourdeaux, than a delicious, vagabondish sense of freedom took possession of her. It was a long time now since she had experienced the feeling, and though she was a slave of her own free will, and the chains that bound her were covered with velvet and down, they galled a little at times. To-day she cast them off, and felt glad.

Perry might prove intractable, their interview might be bitter, the consequences of it might be unpleasant to herself ; but she gave herself up to the hour with the joy of a released bird. "What a bright day it is!" she thought, as the train sped on ; "how blue the sky looks : how sweet the air smells ! I wonder why it is that I notice these things so seldom now ?"

How should she have time to notice them, when occupied from morning till night with the task of pleasing others ?

"I am young," meditated Kitty ; "I have faculty enough for a dozen people ; I could slip into almost any little groove and enjoy existence, provided I had one thing—money. But, as it is, I must let trifles go, however pleasant ; I am like a person on a long journey, who cannot stop to pick up flowers or chase butterflies, though I long to do it."

Then, giving utterance to her thoughts, she said, "Françine, my child, are you happy?"

The girl opened her round blue eyes in surprise.

"Very happy, when mademoiselle is satisfied with me," she said.

"But have you nothing in life to make you happier than that—no sweetheart?"

"Not yet, mademoiselle," answered Françine, blushing. "I have a good mistress, no cares for the morrow, and holidays on saints' days. I am quite contented."

"You poor little thing!" Kitty said, in a tone of magnificent compassion. She could not help pitying Françine for having a contented mind. To her, to live meant to desire, and to desire meant to obtain. After a little while she took a Napoleon out of her purse, rather abruptly, and said, holding it up before the girl's eyes—

"Françine, if you see anything or hear anything to-day that you feel sure I should not wish talked of, you are to hold your peace. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Then, here is your Napoleon. But if you are imprudent, if you tattle, if you allow other people to bother you into talking about me and my affairs, I should send you back to your home forthwith, though I like my little maid so much," she added, with a subtle show of mixed severity and affection.

Françine took her Napoleon, cried a little out of gratitude at being trusted, and then retired into a corner, like a submissive dog, who knows that for the present he is not wanted. Kitty was silent till the train arrived at Bourdeaux, and stepped out on to the platform, calm, though flushed.

She drew her veil over her face, saw at a glance that Perry was not there; then, beckoning a coachman, ordered him to drive her to the Hôtel de la Paix.

There are some things in which one never grows older, and Kitty, who grew, morally speaking, months every day, was

as young as ever in this, that she could not meet Perry unmoved.

Other people were almost impersonal to her. Dr Norman was a sad and lamentable circumstance in her life; Myra had been a fortunate circumstance; Sir George and Ella were delightful circumstances; Perry only seemed a really existent person—flesh and spirit; and she could no more forget him than she could forget herself.

She wished him to keep out of sight; she would fain have forgotten him; she could be outwardly cruel to him—but he exercised the same spell over her that she exercised over other people, only in a different degree.

On this occasion her heart was beating fast all the time that she greeted him with apparent indifference; he did not see it, he did not divine it, but under that calm, beautifully-poised manner, burned a volcanic fire of conflicting passions.

They shook hands and talked of the weather till they were fairly installed in a little salon where Perry had provided a pretty breakfast, adorned with flowers, for Perry never forgot to fête Kitty under any circumstances. Then Kitty let Françine take off her soft summer cloak of creamy white, and her modest straw bonnet with its one little rosebud, and motioning the young girl to a seat by the window, sat down at the head of Perry's table.

"What are we to have?" she said, with an affectation of the old childish gourmandise that Perry had delighted to indulge; "little fish, little birds? and, oh, there is some *nougat!* Give me a bit, this minute, please."

Perry chipped off a bit of the *nougat*, delighted, and Kitty crushed it with her strong, beautiful little teeth, and asked for more. She had overcome her agitation now, and determined to be good and kind to her poor faithful protégé, and make him happy for an hour, if she could.

"And now, tell me," she said, "(my little maid understands no English), from whence you came, and where you are going to? How is dear Polly and her chicks? What is she doing?

And is Vittoria married? I want to hear everything about everybody."

Perry began his catechism at the end. Vittoria was married; Polly Cornford and her chicks had gone home; her stay in Paris had turned out well, he thought, and so on.

"And what are you going to do with yourself this winter, dear Perry?" asked Kitty.

Perry was clumsily carving a little bird.

"I will tell you when I have achieved this performance," he said; and as soon as a delicate bit was finally conveyed to Kitty's plate, added—

"I am going to Madrid to see the pictures of Velasquez, and from Madrid to Cadiz, and from Cadiz to Tunis, and perhaps on to Algiers. Algiers is a fine place for artists, some of our fellows say. If I like it, I shall stay and paint there."

Perry said all this as circumspectly as if the plan had been digested for months, whereas it had only come into his mind during the last few minutes. Finding Kitty miles farther from him than before, reading in her very friendliness and ease a sign that all question of love was over between them, he felt bound to go somewhere, and do something, just because so much was expected of him.

"What a delightful journey!" Kitty cried, enthusiastically, though in her inmost heart she felt offended at Perry's sudden show of independence. "The change will be good for your health, too."

"And where will you be meanwhile?" Perry asked, very sullenly.

"It is quite uncertain as yet."

"Don't marry that miserly old beggar, Sir George Bartelotte," Perry added.

Kitty crimsoned.

"O Perry! Sir George Bartelotte would no more dream of marrying me than I should dream of"—

"Marrying me?"

"If you finish my sentences for me, you must do it after your own fashion," Kitty said, laughing; "but you shouldn't

ask a lady to a pretty breakfast, and then get out of temper with her, Perry ; it is not good manners. You are going such a long way off, too, Heaven knows when we shall see each other again ! Do let us be friends."

Poor Perry battled hard with the pent-up passion of months, but for the life of him he could not conquer it and be pleasant. Kitty coaxed and caressed him with all sorts of kind looks and subtle words, turned over his sketches one by one in her old careful, critical way, made him present her with the prettiest, gave a trinket off her watch-chain in exchange, said he might write to her ; in fine, patronised him in a way that would have been delicious to any very young man—except a rejected lover.

Kitty was hardly more happy than Perry all this time ; but how was Perry to know it ? She laughed, smiled, talked without any apparent effort ; she addressed him as her "foolish boy," her "sad vagabond," her "poor, helpless Perry," as coolly and composedly as if she had been his mother. Perry could not perceive the tumult raging in her heart of hearts, and she felt a secret contempt for him because of his blindness.

Thus they went on misunderstanding each other more and more.

Oh ! alike in love or hate, how blind are we ! Heart beats close to heart—as it seems—and by great, unspeakable, painful efforts, we try to bring ourselves in closest sympathy with our friend ; or the truth is so simple that we think he must find it out ; and it escapes him. We remain mysteries to each other, in spite of ourselves, till both go down to the grave. How often do our words, acts, and looks falsify us, when our souls are true as steel ? Is it a cruel game of fate?—is it a necessary condition of human imperfection ? We know nothing, and can only wait.

Perry did not know that this was a fateful moment for him ; that now, if ever, Kitty might have listened and given way, had he made a show of mastery. That violent fit of ill humour of the night before was reacting in his favour now ; the glimpse of utter freedom she was enjoying with him, the

sunshine, the little feast, the unconcern, the tone of their meeting, recalling, as it did, unregretted, but nevertheless happy days, were all in his favour. His following her was in his favour. Why was he gloomy, sullen, vindictive, just when a little strength and a little sweetness might have stood him in such good stead? Poor Perry had changed within the last few months. Disappointment, absinthe, evil company, had done their work well; he seemed fast accomplishing the ruin upon which he had determined.

The old joyous habit of admiration even seemed wholly gone. If he praised Kitty's dress or looks, it was in a savagely jealous manner; and when she said do this or that, he obeyed apathetically and slavishly, more like a beaten dog than a lover.

So the hours wore on; and Kitty and Perry, as children who have started for a summer walk holding hands across a tiny brooklet, found the brooklet grow into a brook, and the brook into a rivulet, and the rivulet into a river, broad and deep. They spoke to each other, but their voices had a strange and hollow sound. They could not go back to the point from whence they had started, and the river grew wider and wider. The sky was bright overhead, the earth was bright around; but life seemed cold, and dark, and old to these two, as they lost sight of each other's faces and went their ways.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### *A MYSTERIOUS MISSION.*

THERE is a Spanish proverb which says, "Every hair has its shadow," but the maker of the proverb should have added, by way of moral, "Happy is he who sees it not."

The possessor of superabundant tact can scarcely be a happy person, and Kitty was such a person. She saw the shadow of every hair.

For instance, no sooner had she received Ella's kiss of welcome and Sir George's hand-shake—both were apparently

as cordial as ever—than she knew that something was going wrong. Just a touch of apprehension, just a shade of mistrust, just an approximation of jealousy were evident to her, which would not have been evident to one person out of fifty thousand. Whilst she was making of her day at Bourdeaux as pretty an idyll as could be ; whilst Ella listened, smiled, and asked none but answerable questions, for Ella had plenty of tact too ; whilst Sir George talked naturally of Perry's projected tour and the advantages likely to accrue from it, Kitty saw as clearly as ordinary people see that black is black and white is white, what mischief Perry had worked her. The harm was done, past cure. She must make the best of it.

She worked harder than ever for the next few days. She posed as an angel, and did it to perfection. Sir George could almost have forgiven ugliness in a woman who was so amiable, so lively, so capable as she. Kitty managed the house now, even marketed at times, and this economical proceeding enchanted Sir George beyond anything. Kitty suggested that the courier was unnecessary—a master-stroke ! The courier was dismissed, and Kitty had reached the pinnacle of Sir George's favour. If possible, she devoted herself more to Ella than ever. Ella concluded a dozen times a day that she could not possibly live without Kitty, but she wished Kitty had no protégés, and hesitated before making her one of themselves.

But Ella had an attack of illness, and this brought matters to a crisis. Kitty sat up with her for several successive nights ; but for Kitty's care, the doctor said, Ella might have succumbed. It was Kitty only who could soothe her to sleep, Kitty who could devise a comfortable pillow, Kitty who could think of something for her to eat. Sir George's gratitude was rapturous, and as soon as Ella became convalescent, revived her plan regarding Kitty's future.

"It is not a question of choice, it is a question of necessity," he said. "Kitty must come to us. She is just the sort of person we want ; we are just the people she wants. It really seems a dispensation of Providence—but I don't think, my

dear, we need say anything about salary. What a home it is for her!"

"Papa!" cried Ella, quite shocked; "I am so fond of Kitty that I hate giving her money at all. But two hundred pounds a year would be too little for any gentlewoman, under the circumstances"—

Sir George looked very nervous and uncomfortable.

"I don't want to be shabby, Ella; she is a splendid girl, good as gold, and sharp as a Jew. She will save you the expense of a lady's-maid, and work all sorts of reformations among our extravagant pack of servants into the bargain. But"—

"Indeed, you misunderstand me, papa," Ella answered, colouring painfully. "I want Kitty to be my friend, not my servant. I cannot and will not trade upon her goodness to me."

"But, my dear child, she declares that nothing makes her so happy as doing things for people she likes. Why not let her be happy in her own way?" Sir George chuckled to himself, and added, "and save our pockets when we can!"

"Papa, you would not take that tone if you knew how I dislike it," Ella said; "we are not deciding a question of money. We are thinking of Kitty's happiness and our own."

Sir George was terribly afraid of Ella's anger, and said, very penitently—

"I can't help thinking of money, how can I, when every acre I have goes to a man I hate, and your whole portion must be saved out of my income? I should not be stingy if it were not for this."

Ella laid one of her fragile little hands on his arm.

"Poor, dear papa!" she said, "I am always forgetting the future. I suppose it is because I fancy I shall not live very long to want money at all."

"To return to Miss Silver," began Sir George, abruptly,— he could not bear to dwell for a moment on the probability of Ella's life being short,—"she is to live with us if she likes; that is understood, is it not?"

"On one or two conditions," Ella answered, brightly. "In the first place, you shall not be mulcted much, papa; my income is too large for an invalid, who cannot go to balls and make five toilettes a day"—

"I dare say Miss Silver would not be offended if you gave her a left-off gown now and then. Poor gentlewomen are used to that sort of thing."

"Papa, there are considerations far more important than my left-off gowns. Is Kitty free to accept our offer? Is her family such as to warrant us in making it?"

For some moments both were silent. Sir George was saying to himself:—"What a pity Ella is so much too good and too conscientious for this world! If Miss Silver chooses to throw up an engagement with Mrs Wingfield, what are Mrs Wingfield's feelings to us? If Miss Silver can dress upon a hundred a-year, why put her out of her proper sphere by giving her more? Ella's delicacy is a real misfortune, and yet I would rather lose a hundred pounds than shock her, poor darling!"

Ella's thoughts ran as follows:—"How grossly egotistical and common and little are we with all our efforts at self-refining! Here am I living in a world of books and beautiful things; yet because Kitty is of inferior birth and breeding to myself, I cannot accept Kitty's affections without reluctance. She is bright, generous, self-sacrificing, sympathetic, intensely clear-headed, all that I want in a friend, but this petty, miserable prejudice of social position makes a hypocrite of me."

"I will tell you the best thing to do," Sir George said, at last. "I must go to London before long on business. Why should I not go at once and ease your mind about Miss Silver's family and antecedents by obtaining all necessary information?"

"From whom?" asked Ella, doubtfully.

"From Mrs Wingfield, in the first instance, and from the friends at whose house Mrs Wingfield first made her acquaintance."

"Would not that be under-hand, and a little mean?" Ella said, still doubtful.

"Miss Silver need never know. Provided we do not tell

her, there is no objection to the plan that I can discover. The plain truth of the matter is, Miss Silver has made herself necessary to you, and Miss Silver we must keep, at any cost. I do believe she almost saved your life in this last illness."

Ella's eyes filled.

"How can we ever repay such devotion?" she said.

"You forget that she is poor!" Sir George replied; "and that reminds me to ask you, my dear, what became of all the trinkets your aunt Frances left you? There was a pretty coral necklace, worth very little; why not give it to Miss Silver?"

"O papa! as if Kitty would wear such trumpery! But I am going to give her something on her birthday which will make her look like a queen," and Ella instructed Sir George to bring out a certain little case from her drawer, and take from it two or three strings of exquisite pearls.

"They—are—not—out—of—your—own—jewel-case?" gasped her father.

"I ought first to have told you that they were bought on purpose for Kitty," answered Ella, "knowing your dislike to anything going out of the family. These were never in the family, papa. How lovely they are, and how Kitty will love them for my sake!" and for Kitty's sake she kissed them before they were put away.

Sir George having decided to go to England, decided to go at once, and Kitty had to be told. Ella was a very bad actor. She felt perfectly guiltless of any treachery in her own heart towards her friend, but the mere fact of Sir George's errand seemed mean and under-hand, and she hated herself for being the prime mover in such a step. In spite of all her efforts to the contrary, she showed evident embarrassment of manner when the subject of her father's journey was brought forward, excusing the journey unnecessarily, apologising to Kitty for it, and saying a hundred things that aroused Kitty's suspicions. Ella would fain have been doubly and trebly loving to Kitty just now; for had she not watched by her bedside during nights of suffering, and tended her like a sister? But she could not play the hypocrite; she could not show a fondness

and confidence in words that her deeds wholly wanted. So poor Ella, after the way of very sensitive people, tormented herself and punished herself a thousand times more than occasion required.

Kitty had vague grounds for uneasiness. She saw plainly enough that there was some secret at the bottom of Sir George's sudden departure for England; but how could such a secret affect her directly? She could hardly believe herself to be of so much importance in Ella's or her father's eyes as to imagine that the journey was made on her account. And yet she felt instinctively that she had something to do with it.

Did they suspect any secret engagement existing between herself and a man of inferior station? Did they know of her engagement with Dr Norman? Had Myra compromised her in their eyes? Kitty asked herself a hundred questions of this kind. She felt it just possible that Myra might have worked a little mischief. Myra had given up all idea of going to Arcachon now, and by every post entreated Kitty to return to her. But Ella was ill—and how could she go? Then Sir George was obliged to visit England, and how could she leave Ella alone? There was always a plausible reason for Kitty remaining where she was; and Myra's patience was on the verge of giving way, when a diversion came in the shape of her old lover, the ugly, the clever, the fascinating Captain Longley.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IT was Polly Cornford who had persuaded—nay, constrained—Perry to make a little tour, though at starting he had no more idea of meeting Kitty than he had of meeting any other person at all like her. What with Perry's liking for Laura, and Laura's liking for Perry, poor Mrs Cornford had led an uneasy life of it for weeks past. All that was best and brightest in Perry's nature seemed to be consumed by his passion for Kitty, burnt

up, shrivelled, destroyed. Who could recognise in the morose, quarrelsome, bitter Perry of to-day, his old, enthusiastic, genial, sweet-natured, sociable self?

Perhaps Laura was the only person who would not believe him changed; and to her, in truth, he tried to be the same. His motive was a kind one, but the consequences of it were cruel. Laura looked upon all the world as unjust to poor Perry, and tried to make up for the injustice of the world by extra kindness on her part. Perry accepted her consolations in spite of himself.

But a day came when Perry's sense of danger, and Mrs Cornford's exhortations, prevailed over every other consideration, and he went away. He did not want to ruin any one but himself. He thought that Laura would soon forget him.

"Whatever you do, don't write to her," Mrs Cornford had said at parting. "Folly spoken is as harmless as a dishonoured bill; folly written down, is an I O U that you must pay one day. Send her your love if you like, but don't come back to Paradise Place till you've recovered your senses, or married a black woman."

"Don't be so horribly afraid of my coming back, my good soul," Perry said, with unpardonable sourness. "You can let my studio to-morrow, if you like."

"Perugino, if I didn't love you as your own mother might do"—

"Might, but didn't," interrupted Mr Perry, with admirable satire. "You forget that she ran away from my father, and no more thought of me than if I had been a little rat in her cupboard."

"O Perry! you make a bad hand at acting the brute; your heart is in the right place, as the ass said to the master who cudgelled him. But when you are thousands of miles away you will think of Polly Cornford, the veritablest ass that ever was, and wish you had not cudgelled her so often."

"Good-bye, and God bless you!" Perry said, kissing her in a boyish fit of penitence. "Why did you pick Kitty and me out of the gutter, to serve you thus?"

Then he pushed his way on to the platform of the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest, and never looked back at poor Polly, who was crying in the third-class waiting-room.

She went back, after a time, consoled. If anything could effect Perry's cure, she felt that it was foreign travel. He loved travel as passionately as only artists can. In his prime days of enjoyment, and zealous, though intermittent laboriousness, a trip to Havre or Dieppe, effected at the least possible cost, had refreshed and invigorated him for months. A run down to Harwich by boat would be a tonic alike to mind and body ; a day at Marlow would inspire him with rapture ; for it is the enviable faculty of the born artist to renew his strength by briefest glimpses of the beautiful world of Nature, in which adverse circumstances do not permit him to spend his days. Mrs Cornford had packed Perry's knapsack with her own hands, putting in all sorts of things he might want : drugs for the cure of ague and cholera, woollen vests, waterproof mocassins, and money. Having done this, she sent a blessing after him, and went home to paint laboriously for the support and education of her orphan nieces, and the benefit of her poor relations in general.

Perry set off on his travels, wilfully determined to see nothing, enjoy nothing, paint nothing. He traversed the lovely region of La Dordogne in perfect autumnal weather, without losing his evil temper, and reached Bourdeaux in as dull, morbid, unproductive state of mind as a man could well be. There he had unexpectedly come upon traces of Kitty. Turning over the pages of the Visitors' Guide, he saw this entry—*Sir George Bartelotte and party, en route to Arcachon*—and of course he must see Kitty at any cost.

When Kitty left him, almost savage with a new sense of disappointment, he was divided between two minds. He was no more to Kitty than the pebbles under his feet, but Laura loved him, and the little love he had to give would suffice to make her happy. Should he retrace his steps, and marry Laura, and earn a living by painting pictures as best he could ? Or should he go on, caring for no one, letting no one care for

him, and painting only when the fancy took him ? He decided to choose between these two courses by tossing up three francs.

Heads were for going forwards, tails for returning home. Heads decided that he was to go on. So he went on.

He spent two or three days at Biarritz, and from thence—always travelling by third class and sleeping in cheap little inns—journeyed across the Pyrenees into Spain. He passed the weird region of the Landes, which at other times would have affected him with eerie, fanciful moods ; and the demon still clung to him. The weather was one long pageant of golden sunshine,—Nature, like a coquette, seeming to make herself more beautiful than ever, in order to win back the heart of the poor, unhappy, forsaken young artist. Who, even in the Pyrenees, saw such skies, such mountains, such pine woods, such stars as he ? For Nature fêtes not the princes and possessors of the land, but her lovers, with the greatest of her noontide glories and sunset pomps ; she puts a carpet of flowers under their feet, she sends wild, beautiful birds across their way, who sing to them. And Perry had glimpses and snatches of rapture in spite of himself. “It is of no use for me to paint anything,” he would say, but he painted, nevertheless.

“Oh ! what a divine world were this,” he thought, “if Kitty or I had never been born ! Were I not such a poor devil going to the bad,” he mused, “I would pick up Spanish—it is such an enchanting language from beginning to end.”

And he found the world divine in spite of Kitty, and picked up Spanish, though a poor devil going to the bad.

It is quite wonderful in how many ways genius contrives to manifest itself. Perry had not been on Spanish soil a fortnight before he could talk in very pretty Castilian, play the guitar a little, dance a bolero, and sing half a hundred *coplas*. He did these things with such winning abandonment of manner, and was, moreover, so fascinating with his large blue eyes, clear, slightly sunburnt complexion, and dark gold-brown curls and beard, that he was always obliged to leave pleasant places because some pretty Pepa or Gregoria had fallen in love with him. What were Pepas or Gregorias to him ? A delusion

and a snare only, so he made good his escape before entangled past extrication. Poor Perry was as little inclined to turn gay Lothario now as when a mere boy he had courted his handsome, sulky, slatternly Kitty, in the happy past. Dissipation had no sort of temptation for him. He had tried dissipation in Paris, as we have seen, but his natural temperament kept him young, and made hope and other good things possible.

Poor Perry's diary in these days was touchingly wayward and simple. He sent from time to time such valuable pieces of information as these to Polly Cornford—Polly Cornford, who wept for him and prayed, in a fashion, for him with the tenderness of a mother.

“*Burgos, 12th October.*—Nothing to paint, so I came away.

“*Valladolid.*—Here I fell ill, of low fever. The landlord's daughter, Isidora, gave me disgusting drinks of herbs and pills. She was very pretty and very kind, but I could not forgive the pills.

“*Escorial.*—I got such a good dinner here, but felt just as miserable after it as before.

“*Madrid.*—Velasquez was a wonderful, superior kind of human being. If he had only had Kitty to paint!

“*Madrid, 2d entry.*—Do you know anything about Goya, dear Polly? I don't, but his pictures are to be seen here. What a wretch I am not to enjoy these galleries!

“*Madrid, 3d entry.*—I don't enjoy Madrid, so of what use to go on? And yet I go on. I suppose it is every one's fate to go on, and not to like it.”

And when he was fairly in Andalusia, “the sweetest morsel of the Peninsula,” of which Polly Cornford would fain have had glowing suggestions, he tantalised her with the following letter:—

“DEAR POLLY,

“I have often heard you say that ‘an ass in Spain is sure to bray in Portugal,’ and I never heard one of your proverbs that better applied to me. I am just as much of a fool concerning one particular person as ever; and I hate myself

for letting that sweet child, Laura Norman, think so well of me. Tell her I am the biggest scoundrel on the face of the earth, with my love, please.

"The women at Granada are very pretty. We had a jolly little dance last night. I do think I could make my fortune as a Spanish dancer in London. Little Isidora here would dance all over the world with me, I am sure.

"Yours affectionately,

"PERRY.

"P.S.—I paint very little ; a few daubs, which I sell on the way, that is all."

Perry had fallen in with a rich Englishman at Granada who loved art when he could get it cheap, and to him he had sold a dozen exquisite suggestions of the Alhambra, for about five pounds each. The pictures were carefully packed, insured, and sent to adorn a country-house in England ; the money was squandered ere it could fairly be called Perry's own.

He lingered in Granada, captivated, intoxicated, entranced by its gracious, fanciful beauty. For a time the sense of the perfection surrounding him, both of nature and of art, held him spell-bound and happy. What were his insignificant life and love ? what was anything in all the world beside the Alhambra ? But this exalted mood passed away, leaving him again sad, and small, and self-encumbered.

Wherever he went he found rich, parsimonious English and American travellers, who would buy his pictures, which were almost as cheap as photographs, and a hundred times as valuable. Thus he paid his expenses as he went along, and was always in the predicament either of having his pockets full of money, or wanting a hundred reals to pay his landlord's bill.

So he travelled on. He went to Seville, to Cadiz, and from thence to Gibraltar, always seeing marvellous things with those unforgettable, artistic eyes of his, and always ungraciously longing to turn back.

At Gibraltar his indecision took a stronger form. One day he took a berth in a steamer going to Bourdeaux ; the next,

he half settled to sail for Liverpool ; on the third, he really sailed for the shores of Africa.

"Kitty is only a woman—I will forget her," he said ; "and what will remind me of Kitty in Africa?"

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### CHAPTER XXXIX.

*PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE (CONTINUED).*

PERRY landed at a little seaboard town, called Némours, on the borders of Morocco ; and when he had climbed one or two fiery-coloured, sierra-shaped hills, and looked across the broad blue sea on one side, and the waving pale-gold desert on the other, he set off with a couple of French colonists, who were making the inland journey on horseback. Perry had hardly felt so happy for years as he did to find himself on a plump little barb, with pistols at his side, which he was assured would prove of use. He had never ridden anything before better than a melancholy seaside hack, let out at a shilling an hour, and his sole knowledge of pistol-shooting consisted of target practice at Epsom races ; but his companions, with inborn ineffable French amiability, took pains to teach him what was necessary, and Perry came to no mischief. How the good little horse liked his rider is another matter.

The three travelled on in perfect harmony as far as Tlemeçen—that beautiful Granada of the West, of which so few travellers know. Perry was sadly disappointed at having fallen in with no Arab thieves or assassins on the way ; he had hoped for one murder, at least ; but the sublime vision of the ruined Moorish capitol, rising like a tower of pure gold against an amethyst sky, consoled him. Here he parted company with his pleasant friends, and stayed a week, exquisitely alive to the touching, tranquil, fairy-like loveliness of the place. It was like dreaming over the Arabian Nights. Dainty, dark-eyed children, in bright-coloured fez and pantaloons, played in the

streets, every one a real, live little Prince Bedreddin. Veiled women glided among the dusky olive groves. The beautiful white mosques were crowded with worshippers at the summons of the muezzin. And when the many-coloured but tender daylight passed away, came the wondrous southern night, with skies of purplish black, and large silvery stars like moons shining direct overhead.

Perry spent half his days in cutting Kitty's name on the ruins. On the base of a majestic monolith, that had been split in two by earthquake, he cut this legend very laboriously—

"KITTY IS FALSE."

"It cannot harm her," he mused, as he chiselled away in the twilight, with only a little Arab goat-herd watching by. "Who will ever come here who knows either Kitty or me? But what I have written will remain for hundreds of years, and it is some consolation to hand down her perfidy from generation to generation, even on the borders of the desert."

He painted three or four charming, mystical twilight scenes; but here, fortunately for him, there were no buyers, so the sketches were saved and put aside. At Tclemçen he fell in with a grazier bound to the farthest French station in the interior to buy sheep, who invited him to share his gig. Perry saw a vision of Bedouin encampments, wild gazelles feeding by turbulent streams, caravans coming out of yellow atmospheres, and the Great Desert beyond all, and went. It was hardly wonderful that he should go, but incredible that he should have come away. To live in the open air—in a wide, fresh world, without cities or conventionalities; to breathe the sweet, fragrant atmosphere of the desert; to see savage life in its gayest, most genial aspect; to share the Bedouin's hospitality,—all this fulfilled the dreams of Perry's boyhood. He grew broader, browner, and stronger than he had ever been in his life. He learned to saddle a horse, to shoot the jackal, to hunt the gazelle, to use his muscles in all sorts of ways. He could say a hundred things in the most astonishing Arabic, full of whistling aspirates and wonderful sibilations. He found him-

self forgetting to be unhappy; yet he could not rest. The grazier said to him one day—

“ You are young, you like adventures, you want to see what this country is like. Be my partner. I dare say you have a few thousand francs—all you Englishmen are rich.”

“ I haven’t a sou. I’m a painter,” Perry said.

“ *Eh bien!* stay with me for a few months. You’re welcome to bed and board, if you will be a little handy now and then; a painter couldn’t be better placed.”

Perry shook his head.

“ I should like it, but the truth is, I’ve been hardly used by a woman, and though she will no more marry me than she will marry you, I can’t rest so far away from her.”

So Perry forsook the life that he loved so well, and joined the first party to be heard of travelling to Oran. Oran is a stately, prosperous, half-Spanish city, two days’ journey from Gibraltar, from which one can sail to all parts of the world. Perry went down to the harbour as soon as he arrived, in search of some vessel that would carry him to any English port at a cheaper rate than the mail-packet. He bargained with the master of a cattle-steamer, bound to Harwich in a day or two, and had paid his passage-money, and carried his chattels on board, when a marvellous thing happened.

Winter was over now, and the balmy, delicious, southern spring had appeared like a dream in the night. With the sunshine and the south wind came beautiful, graceful pleasure-boats, like white-winged birds, which fluttered to the harbour, and there rested for a while. Perry watched them with childish glee, as he loitered on the shore, sketch-book in hand, and hoped that in the next stage of existence he should be the owner of one of those pretty yachts, and not the poor artist drawing it from a distance with longing eyes.

One morning he lay at full length on the sands, watching a yacht come in; she was an elegant little craft, and scudded along in a fair wind at such a rate that one might have fancied a pirate-ship was at her heels. Perry saw a red flag hoisted in the harbour with a smile of contempt.

"Why on earth should they hoist colours?" he said; "they haven't got Kitty on board!"

By the time he had made a little sketch of the yacht she was very near the harbour, and Perry put up his glass to see what kind of people were on board.

The party consisted of about nine ladies and gentlemen, all English, as Perry surmised, and of the stereotyped order of travellers. There were one or two fashionable young ladies in straw hats and thick serge dresses; one or two young men with long limbs, broad shoulders—bearded immensely; the invariable amateur author or artist, with pockets crammed full of sketch-books and French novels; the invariable elderly papa, with the broad shoulders, and good-humoured, Philistine, purse-proud smile. Perry was about to put down his glass superciliously, when he caught sight of a face that made him grow pale and eager in a moment.

He thought he must be dreaming, and looked again and again.

He was not dreaming.

The yacht had been honoured for a good cause. She had got Kitty on board!

It was as true as the sun shining over his head, as the millions on millions of little waves that rippled at his feet. What woman in the wide world could be mistaken—even momentarily—for Kitty? Look, figure, tread, were as much her own as particular tones of her voice, and particular hues of her eye. The very turn of her shoulders would proclaim her among a thousand women.

Perry rushed from one sailor to the other, in frantic curiosity. To whom did the yacht belong? Whither was she bound? How long would she stay in port?—and so on.

No one knew anything, except that the yacht belonged to an Englishman in the diplomatic service at Gibraltar—which accounted for the colours being hoisted—and that she would most likely make for Algiers.

"The English always go to Algiers. It is such a gay place," said one; and Perry could learn no more.

He skulked about the harbour all that day, determined to follow the yacht at any risk. Some of the party came on shore, but Kitty was not of the number, and Perry only saw her come on deck once or twice. Towards evening he contrived to have a little talk with the mate on his way to the town, and from him learned that the yacht would sail for Algiers next day, and would probably put in there for six weeks.

Perry of course tried to get back his passage-money, but the captain proving irascible he yielded the point loftily, and spent his last Napoleon in paying for a second class fare by mail-packet to Algiers. Unfortunately the steamer did not start for two days, during which Perry fretted as feverishly as if an important issue depended upon his arrival in Algiers. He knew well enough that nothing but disappointment would follow upon any intercourse he might have with Kitty. He could no more keep away from her than the moth can keep from the candle that burns its wings so cruelly.

The yacht had a fair wind, and reached Algiers ere the mail-packet was half-way. For various good reasons she lay-to a few hours instead of weeks, and was scudding homewards before Perry put foot on shore.

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## CHAPTER XL.

SIR GEORGE set off in a state of excitement that bordered on elation. If one thing in the world was almost as dear to him as his daughter, it was his ducats; and he felt that to secure Kitty as a member of his household would be an inestimable piece of economy. He was one of the few men who could mix up his admiration for a young and fascinating woman with the baldest mercenary consideration. Kitty was handsome, and he admired her; Kitty was clever, and he liked her company; Kitty was masterly in dealing with the common affairs of life; for that quality he adored her.

Poor Sir George's nature had been embittered by various causes. In the first place, he began life by marrying a penniless girl for love, an act of self-sacrifice for which he could never quite forgive himself, especially as she had borne him no son. In the second, his name and estate would go to the man he disliked above all others in the world. Thirdly, he was comparatively poor, and could only provide for Ella's future by letting his house in Clarges Street, and his country seat, and living economically abroad.

He had one extravagance—namely, a passion for old rare books ; but that one bore the same relation to his numerous economies as the Corsair's "one virtue linked unto a thousand crimes." He travelled second class when alone ; dressed as shabbily as decency permitted ; drank cheap wine with water ; dined off a single dish ; and answered people's letters on the blank leaf of their own. In fine, where ordinarily economical people spent a shilling, he spent about ninepence ; if fairly out of Ella's sight, sixpence. What the grosser pleasures of the world were to other men, the pleasures of saving were to him. To feel himself at liberty to be as economical as he pleased was a little debauch of which he could not make enough. He grew gay, brisk, and affectionately disposed towards the world when thus inebriated ; would be courteous to the pitch of geniality with the second or third class passengers with whom he travelled ; would be civil to French officials, whom he detested ; would offer a cigar to any one sitting next him. When reckoning up the expenses of the day, he chuckled to himself, and praised himself as if he had achieved a great action, and would enjoy the profound sleep of a happy conscience.

As soon as the business that took him to London was fairly over, he presented himself at Mrs Wingfield's lodgings in Green Street.

Myra received everybody cordially, and over a charming little tête-à-tête lunch, which Sir George did not disdain, as he only practised abstemiousness when it answered some end, they talked a great deal of Kitty and Kitty's affairs.

Simple as Myra was, she got Sir George to tell her all that

she wanted to know before saying a word ; and then, much too tickled at the new turn affairs were taking to be angry, she burst into a hearty laugh, and said—

“ My dear Sir George, what an odd notion to think of concerning yourself about Kitty’s antecedents or belongings ! Nobody in the world does that. Of course, Kitty has friends and lovers, and may have what you call antecedents, for aught I know ; but, so long as she contrives to keep them so beautifully in the background, what matters it to us ? ”

She opened her large, sleepy, blue eyes, and fixing them on Sir George’s wizen, hairy face with an inexpressible mixture of childish *naïveté* and womanly shrewdness, added—

“ You might, with perfect safety, marry Kitty, Sir George. She would take care that her family or family affairs never annoyed you.”

“ I don’t want to marry Miss Silver,” Sir George said, pettishly. “ I want to make your dear Ella happy—that is all.”

“ Ella is a spoiled child crying for Kitty instead of the moon,” Myra rejoined ; “ but the moon won’t come down, and Kitty will.”

“ Ella is so excessively tender of conscience that she would not for worlds make any proposals to Miss Silver till after I had seen you. We feel, indeed, that we stand in a delicate position with regard to yourself”—

“ As if I should hold you responsible”—

“ I do assure you that we have never once urged her to remain with us longer than her previous arrangements with you would enable her to do so,” Sir George continued, apologetically.

“ Kitty is a free agent. I never held her bound except by her inclinations and affections,” Myra said, a little bitterly.

“ I am thankful to hear you say so, Mrs Wingfield. Dear Ella has been quite troubled lest we should appear to have acted an unfriendly part towards you.”

“ Kitty left me because she liked it, and she will stay with you for the same reason,” Myra answered. “ I hope she will not change her mind in a great hurry. That is all.”

"I don't think she will change her mind, because she is so devotedly attached to Ella. They are like sisters," Sir George said.

"Oh! that counts for nothing. She loved me like a sister a few months back."

Sir George did not think any worse of Kitty for thus being spoken of by her dearest friend. On the contrary, he rather admired Kitty for showing so much sagacity in the selection of her patrons. Of course, Kitty knew well enough how immeasurably superior Ella's social position was to Myra's—the former a baronet's daughter, the latter a merchant's widow! Sir George laughed in his sleeve at Myra's insensibility to this view of the question; and as he liked the little lady, and had no particular motive for und deceiving her, he allowed her to go on deceiving herself. Kitty adored his darling Ella; but it seemed preposterous that Myra should even have expected adoration in equal degree. Excepting in Kitty's case—for Kitty was an exception to every rule—Sir George completely confounded personalities with circumstances. A person stood represented in his mind as the sum total of so much wealth, so much rank, and so many worldly advantages in general. Mere intellectual attainments—whether scientific, literary, social, or artistic—went for very little; amiabilities and moral qualities were altogether ignored.

He returned pertinaciously to the matter of Kitty's kith and kin.

"My dear Ella being so young and motherless, I feel it my duty to know something definite about this young lady's position in the world. She will not marry. A girl without a penny rarely marries out of her own sphere; and if she is to be Ella's companion for years to come, we want to feel sure that no poor or disreputable relations can come down upon us."

"Ask Dr Norman, then," Myra said, not caring to become responsible in the matter. "He wanted to marry Kitty; and if that does not look like putting trust in her, what does?"

Sir George thought this a good idea, and, after a little

more talk, rose to go, Myra adding a word of advice on the threshold.

"If you are guided by me," she said at parting, "you will just give Kitty big lumps of sugar, and not trouble your head about anything else. What good are pedigrees to clever people?"

When her visitor had gone, Myra went to her room, and cried for an hour over Kitty's unkind behaviour. She was going back to India, the wife of Captain Longley; but was not her approaching marriage an extra reason for needing her friend?

Myra was not romantic. She knew the world very well, and she entertained no sentimental notions about love and marriage. She had been married before, and she understood the necessity of husband and wife not boring each other, if they would be happy. But she was so terribly dependent on others, that she felt she must inevitably bore Captain Longley if she were shut up with him alone in some station up country. If Kitty were but with her always, to organise a little society, all would go smoothly. Myra really cared for Kitty, and she now declared to herself bitterly that she would never again trust a friend as she had trusted this false one.

Sir George went down to Shelley House next day, determined to fulfil his errand to the best of his ability, in spite of Myra's somewhat flippant deprecations.

It is just possible that there may have been a touch of jealousy at the bottom of this obstinacy. Sir George no more dreamed of marrying Kitty than he dreamed of marrying Myra: but had she not smiled upon him and flattered him in a hundred ways, wearing the colours he liked best, singing his favourite songs, and reminding him from day to day that his admiration was worth the having?

Kitty had often talked of Shelley House, of her kind, admirable friend Dr Norman, of his high-spirited, self-managed children, and all the love they bore her. She had, moreover, hinted at having been a sort of governess to the little girls; but beyond the period of her sojourn at Shelley House, Kitty's

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account of herself was as vague as the carboniferous epoch in geological history. Whilst Sir George and Ella remained abroad, moving from place to place, not fixing their abode anywhere, it little mattered whether Ella's friend and companion was the daughter of a clergyman—or a chimney-sweep; but if they came to England, or settled down at Rome, Brussels, or Paris, it would be quite another thing.

So Sir George determined to find out from the man who had wanted to marry Kitty whether she was a person fit to live with his daughter; and as the question was a delicate one, he pondered on the best mode of putting it.

But he was doomed to a temporary disappointment. On inquiring for Shelley House at the railway station, he was informed that Dr Norman had lately lost a considerable sum of money by a bank failure; that he had in consequence left the country for some time; that Shelley House had been put into proper order and let for a term of years, and that the owner was living in a very small house in London.

Sir George walked to the house that had been Kitty's home for so many ambitious months, and having obtained Dr Norman's address from its new tenant, returned to London in a very bad temper indeed. He had spent exactly nineteen shillings and sixpence for no purpose. It was a vexatious thought.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### *WHAT DR NORMAN SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF.*

DR NORMAN had hired a pretty cottage in the Addison Road, Kensington, boasting of a little flower-garden in front, and a little croquet-lawn and shrubbery at the back; and, though a mere doll's house compared to Shelley, pleasant enough. The situation was, moreover, quiet, healthful, and convenient. Novelty delights the young; and Dr Norman's children thought it a splendid thing that papa should have brought them to London, within reach of the South Kensington

Museum, the Crystal Palace, the Polytechnic, the Zoological Gardens, and so many bewitching places. Dr Norman was not one of those men who do things by halves ; and when he woke up one morning, and found himself on the verge of poverty, he set to work to retrieve his fortune by every means in his power. It was the immediate loss of some thousands of pounds by the failure of a bank that had induced him to look into his affairs, and he was aghast at the inroads made upon a fair patrimony by the mismanagement and neglect of a few years. So he withdrew Regy from college, and sent him to a German University ; put the younger boys to University College School instead of Eton and Harrow ; let his land to a respectable farmer on a long lease, and his home to a wealthy friend ; reduced his staff of servants to three maids ; and resolved to turn the steady work of years to some account at last.

Prissy had not yet decided what sort of education would be best for herself and Laura, declaring that nothing could be thought of at present but the arrangement of the house. What with choosing chintzes, buying flowers for the little conservatory, hanging up pictures, and the like, the little maid was in her element ; and when Sir George presented himself, who should open the door but Miss Prissy, a long lilac apron tied over her short frock, her fair hair blown about wildly, looking the very impersonation of briskness and bustle.

"Oh, dear !" she said, when Sir George gave her his card, requesting to see her papa ; "we didn't want visitors yet, and especially such grand ones. The hall is littered with books and things, and my doll's linen is hanging on the stairs to dry"—

"Prissy," put in Laura from the dining-room, "ask the gentleman in."

So Prissy held the door about a quarter of a yard open, and led the way to Dr Norman's study, a quiet room at the top of the house, talking volubly all the way.

"It is such an undertaking to move," she said ; "how many times have you moved ? And how many little girls have you ?

This is our bath-room. Isn't it a nice one? We all have baths every day, and the dolls once a week. Have you got such a nice bath-room in your house?"—and so on.

Dr Norman looked very fairly at home among his books, scientific appliances, and cabinet of fossils, considering that they had only been unpacked within the last week or two. He bore the interruption with the suavity of a proverbially absent man, colouring a little when Sir George announced himself. What could have brought Kitty's new friend to him?

"Prissy, give Sir George Bartelotte a chair," he said; and finding that a matter of time, since all the chairs were full, added, "you are our first visitor in our new house."

Sir George apologised, as in duty bound to do, and then fidgeted a little, not knowing how to begin.

Dr Norman relieved him of his embarrassment, by saying, quite quietly—

"I believe that a lady who was very dear to my children once is now under your roof. Is Miss Silver well and happy?"

"Remarkably well, and in the best possible spirits. Ahem—it is of Miss Silver I wish to speak to you."

Sir George paused and fidgeted.

Dr Norman made no sort of effort to help him.

"My daughter has become quite attached to Miss Silver," said Sir George, pompously.

"Indeed!" was Dr Norman's reply.

"Of course such an attachment affords matter for serious consideration."

Dr Norman was silent.

"Differences of social position—ahem—possibility of embarrassments in the future, deter Miss Bartelotte and myself from prematurely securing Miss Silver's valuable services in the future."

"Confound the fellow," thought Dr Norman, "he speaks of Kitty as if she were a lady's-maid!"

"Whilst we feel that it is one of these occasions deserving sacrifice on our part," Sir George went on, loftily, "my daughter is an invalid, and requires about her a lady who would

be at the same time a devoted friend and a conscientious adviser. This young lady seems in every way fitted for the post. She is a capital arithmetician, an indefatigable *menagère*, an incomparable economist, and Miss Bartelotte feels towards her as an equal. But we know nothing of Miss Silver's family, absolutely nothing."

Then he looked at Dr Norman, and waited. Dr Norman was as uncommunicative as a statue.

"We thought that perhaps you might be able to give us some information, Dr Norman."

"Miss Silver stayed for some time in my house as a welcome and honoured guest, and only consented to prolong her stay indefinitely on the condition that she should help my little girls in managing the household," answered Dr Norman. "We did not wish Miss Silver to go. She went of her own accord."

"And Miss Silver came to you as a stranger?"

"As a guest," replied Dr Norman; adding, with a smile, "one hardly expects of one's guests that they bring a reference, like servants, as to honesty and good behaviour."

This sarcasm nettled Sir George.

"But you will grant the case to be different with a young lady of my daughter's rank," he said. "We should be acting unfairly towards Miss Silver, if we placed her in a sphere to which she had no right, and from which she might be unpleasantly ejected by the merest trifle. We want to prevent any possible misunderstanding or complication in the future, before it is finally settled that she remains with us. But, since you cannot give me any information, I will no longer trespass on your time."

"I know of only one person who could tell you whether Miss Silver is a proper person to enter upon the duties of Miss Bartelotte's friend and conscientious adviser," Dr Norman said, "and that is the lady with whom she lived before coming to us. Here is her card. She is an admirable person, though very unconventional in her mode of life. By all means call upon her."

And he put Mrs Cornford's card into Sir George's hand, and bowed him out with formal politeness.

"Incomparable snob!" thought the philosopher. "Pedantic prig!" thought the aristocrat, as the two men parted.

Dr Norman returned to his work in a very impatient frame of mind. He was an exceedingly modest man, estimating himself and his social position at their lowest worth; but he could not help thinking that Kitty was about to sell herself into slavery, and that, as his wife, she would have been free, honoured, and happy. He was of too frank and affectionate a nature to deem otherwise—always supposing that Kitty cared for him—since he would have cut off his right hand rather than accept a sacrifice from any woman. Well, she had chosen for herself, and he could only hope that her choice was a happy one. Their paths had diverged as entirely as the paths of travellers bound eastward and westward, and he trusted that they might never again meet. Kitty had used him hardly, and his heart was very bitter towards her still. She was not only guilty of treachery, but she was guilty of slow, wilful, it almost seemed premeditated, treachery; and he was not yet trying to forgive her. He was trying hard not only to make the best of his life, but to make something good of it. His unfortunate passion for Kitty had worked healthfully—as all good men's passions do;—in the first instance, arousing him to a sense of fresher, more hopeful, younger life; in the last, spurring him on to seek satisfaction and happiness elsewhere. Disappointment was teaching him to be just to himself. The one supreme grief of his life had palsied his energies for a while; the smaller one had quickened them. He had been so badly used by one unworthy of him, that indignation became ambition.

"The world cannot use me so ill as Kitty has done," he said, "and I will go in and strive with my fellow-men."

To be properly estimated we must live among our equals; and Dr Norman, who had passed with his country neighbours as a very poor creature indeed, soon found his level in London. He selected a choice circle of friends, threw himself heart and soul into his own special line of scientific speculation, and lived

a life of thoughtfulness and activity. The loss of his money affected him chiefly for his children's sake. He felt that it would only have happened to a man as careless and self-absorbed as himself, and determined that his boys and girls should not go unprovided for because of their father's fault. To fit the former for professions, and to give the latter the best education possible, was an end for which he was ready to make any effort or sacrifice in his power. He resolved to work.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

NEVER had Paradise Place looked more unmitigatedly disreputable than on the occasion of Sir George Bartelotte's visit. It was now winter-time, when the London atmosphere sucks all the colour out of everything, and makes shabbiness—whether natural or artificial—doubly shabby, and poverty—whether cheerful or melancholy—doubly poverty-stricken. Upon the occasion in question a slight fall of snow had taken place, and Mrs Cornford's nieces, with all the hilarity and unconcern of youth, were sweeping the steps of the little colony, and snowballing each other and the passers-by. The three girls had tucked up their petticoats, and were splashing their untidy little legs and skirts, and brandishing their brooms like the happy gipsies they were. On seeing Sir George knock at Aunty's door, Binnie refrained from sending a well-aimed snowball at his face, and rushed to open it, calling out at the top of her voice, "Aunty, here's a gentleman! It's so jolly, and we haven't near done sweeping yet!"

Then Miss Binnie slammed the door violently, leaving Sir George in the dark, dirty passage to await Mrs Cornford's pleasure. The heart of the baronet sank within him as he took in at a glance all the rollicking, unvarnished, out-spoken Bohemianism of the place. A dirty little lamp burned in the

hall ; a couple of liqueur glasses and a bottle of Hollands stood on a little bracket beside it ; a heap of coals, evidently borrowed of some neighbour, lay in one corner ; whilst overhead, hanging so low as to flap unpleasantly in the face of passers-by, were various articles of linen put out to dry.

Sir George stood aghast. It seemed to him that Kitty's self, Kitty's devotion, and Kitty's economies, were lost to him and Ella for ever.

As he waited thus, Mrs Cornford's voice came down from one of the upper rooms.

"I hope you don't mind waiting, whoever you may be ?" she said. "'Take things easy and you'll grow fat,' as the snail said to the grasshopper. If you were the King of the Cannibal Islands I couldn't come down till I have laid on my next coat of paint ; but I'll do it before you can say the alphabet backwards, or tell me who was Nicodemus' grandmother."

In a few minutes she came down, the upper part of her portly person arrayed in a short blue cloth jacket like a pilot-coat, little the worse for wear, but greatly the worse for paint ; her head wrapped up in an Indian scarf, that shone with the lustre of antiquity, and the pockets of her painting apron full of brushes, pencils, French novels, and walnut shells. Before greeting her visitor she stretched out one shapely arm and brought down all the linen at a blow, hurling it in a bundle to the upper landing-place ; then, turning to Sir George with a good-natured smile, said—

"I've no faith in so much clean linen myself, but we must do as others do in this world."

She ushered him into the same little sitting-room where Laura had first seen Perry, nearly two years ago, and where Kitty had given Laura a drawing-lesson, with all sorts of visions floating before her mind all the time ; and, motioning him to take one arm-chair, dropped into the other with a somewhat abrupt and catechetical—

"Well?"

Sir George very pompously handed her his card, saying to himself, "If that does not put a curb upon the woman's

impudence nothing will ;" but it did not put a curb upon Mrs Cornford's impudence.

She gave an incomparable little " Whew ! " of astonishment, and said, very unceremoniously—

" Oh ! you 're Sir George Bartelotte, are you ? Well, there 's no telling who turns up. I 'm sure I should as soon have expected to see that artful little dodger, Miss Kitty herself."

" I believe you have known Miss Silver from her earliest years ? "

" I should just think I have. Don't I know her ? that 's all ! ' Blood is thicker than water, but you and I are related by other ties,' said the costermonger's dog to the costermonger's donkey, ' for the same stick beats us both.' And Kitty and I, though not related, have had our ups and downs together."

" Miss Silver speaks of her family as having greatly suffered from reduced circumstances."

" Stuff !" Mrs Cornford answered, very impatiently. " I might as well say my circumstances are reduced, because I 've had only one gown to my back all my life."

" It 's quite astonishing that so accomplished a young lady should have had no more advantages," pursued Sir George.

" For my part," said Mrs Cornford, putting on her H's with unusual recklessness, " I think she has done mighty little, living among artists and art-critics as she did, and having all sorts of opportunities. But there was never any making an artist of Kitty Silver. A little money was more to her than all the arts and artists that ever were, as I always said to that foolish boy Perry, when head and ears in love with her."

Sir George trembled in his shoes at what would come next. It was all over with Ella's plan, he said to himself—Kitty must not stay any longer with them ; beautiful, gifted as she was, she must go.

" What was Miss Silver's father ? " he asked, in rather a crestfallen manner. For the first time during the interview the motive of Sir George's coming dawned upon Mrs Cornford's mind. Now, poor Polly Cornford had not a particle of malice

in her composition, and had forgiven Kitty's shortcomings towards herself long ago ; but for the life of her she could not help playing Sir George a trick at Kitty's expense. The pompous little monkey, she thought, I'll teach her not to insult artists again !

"Oh ! you 've come here for Kitty's character, have you ? " she asked.

"I have come, madam," replied Sir George, with loftiness, "to inquire whether Miss Silver's family is of such a stamp as would justify me in retaining her as the companion of my daughter."

"There's no deception about us. You see what we are," said Mrs Cornford, glancing round the room with a wave of the hand ; "that picture opposite to you is worth three hundred pounds, and was given me by the artist C—— (naming a celebrated French artist), a sad unprincipled scapegrace, but such a colourist ! 'Madame Cornford,' he said, 'I hope to see you R.A. before I die—I look upon you as a sister.' 'The nation is an ass, and you won't,' I said. We keep good company, I assure you. That sketch on the mantelpiece was given me by a man whose brains are worth thousands a year ; he comes here when all the world is gaping at his pictures on the Academy walls, and smokes a cigarette with me as simple-hearted as possible. 'There are very few people who are such good company as you, Polly,' he says. 'I can return the compliment, Jemmy,' I reply ; and when the cigarettes are done, we have a bottle of Sauterne and drink to the health of our critics. There's no sort of pretence about us. 'But don't eat us unless you like,' say the thistles to the donkey, and that is what I say to you. We're good-meaning people, who never object to oblige a neighbour by lending him our Sunday clothes, but we're not quite respectable —only a little respectable." Mrs Cornford added, briskly, "But have a little Hollands this cold day—do, now."

"I require no refreshments, I thank you, madam," Sir George said, stiffly ; "and, indeed, I think it hardly necessary to trespass on your time further," and he rose as if to go.

"Hoity-toity, twiddle-dum-dee!" Mrs Cornford cried ; "you

seem as flustered as the devil in a gale of wind. Having told you what we are, I will tell you what Kitty is ; for she's no more like us than a cuckoo is like a cucumber. I wish she were."

Sir George sat down.

"If you think that Kitty's old friends will ever come in her way, you are greatly mistaken," Mrs Cornford continued ; "she loves us—oh ! how she loves us—at a distance!"

"Miss Silver's father was in the Church, I believe ?" asked Sir George, thinking that the latter part of Mrs Cornford's speech augured well.

"I should think he was in the Church, if anybody ever was ! He was a Presbyterian minister, and his name was the Reverend Nehemiah Silver, and he married the only daughter of the younger son of Sir Thomas Mistletoe, who hated the match ; and he (the parson) went out as a missionary to try and convert the Himalayan Mountains."

"I presume, madam, you mean some uncivilised tribes dwelling in the Himalayan regions ?" said Sir George.

"Just as you please," Mrs Cornford went on ; "all I know is that he did not make many converts, and it so preyed upon his mind that he died of a broken heart ; and if you ever go that way—his grave lies exactly half-way between Astracan and Pekin—you will see written somewhere on the stone his name, age, and birthplace. Ah ! poor Kitty, little you know what a father you lost in him !"—and Mrs Cornford held her apron to her face to hide the laughter that she could not control.

It has been already hinted that Kitty's parentage was a hazy affair ; but if we want our coat of arms made out, we go to the herald's office and get a fine crest in a twinkling : why should we be more scrupulous about other fictions ? Kitty had called the one a clergyman and the other a daughter of the youngest son of a baronet, whose title was now extinct, and no one had any ground for supposing the statements to be imaginary.

Mrs Cornford started from her chair and seized Sir George by the arm with a convulsive grip.

"Whatever you do, don't harrow up poor Kitty's feelings by

talking of this. She cannot bear to be reminded that she has lost a father—and such a father!"

"And has Miss Silver's youth been spent here?" asked Sir George, not dreaming that Mrs Cornford was making fun of him.

"Oh! bless your soul, no. She was here in the flesh—but what's that? A swan is always a swan, though it condescends to feed with the ducks. And Miss Kitty condescended to feed with the ducks till something better turned up. You see, we are only a little respectable, and she was always the fine lady."

"And you think that—ahem—no inconvenience would arise to us in consequence of Miss Silver's early connections?"

"Inconvenience!" cried Mrs Cornford, indignantly. "Kitty Silver would scorn to put us to shame by the spectacle of her own grandeur; she would rather suffer death by slow fire than humiliate her old friends!"

"That sentiment does her honour," replied Sir George, brightening up,—"very great honour indeed."

"Who says that it does not?" Mrs Cornford said. "I can see through a brick as well as most people, but make no comments. Kitty's old friends will no more trouble her than the mummies in Egypt; and she will no more trouble them than she will trouble—her father's ghost at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. 'I love you dearly, but you're really too good for this world,' says the spider to the fly before gobbling him up; and that is how Kitty—I mean worldly people do. But, to change the subject, Kitty will never disgrace your daughter, rest assured of that. The beggar who has turned thief won't look at his old friends any more than a duke would."

"It seems to me that the proverb is hardly pertinent," said Sir George.

"Well, we're not beggars, certainly, and Kitty isn't a thief, but it seemed to come in handy just then. When proverbs come in so handy they always offend people."

"Pardon me, I was not offended, madam," Sir George said; "but I have really trespassed too long on your valuable time, and will take my leave."

"You'll have a cup of coffee, won't you?" said Mrs Cornford.

"Indeed, no, I thank you."

"Well, would you like to see a picture that is decently done—for a woman?" she asked.

As Sir George knew something about pictures, and always accepted gratuitous pleasures, he accepted that invitation.

Wonderful indeed is the spell of genius. Providence had rather scantly endowed the poor baronet with the fiery particle called soul: he loved money better than art, and appreciated worldly things beyond ideal beauty. But when Mrs Cornford led him up to her easel, and he saw before him a masterly subject, well conceived, splendidly coloured, and full of pure, healthful, manly sentiment, he forgot the rollicking vulgarity of the place, and the offensive familiarity of the woman, in sincere admiration.

"By George!" he said, "you ought to get a good price for such a picture as that."

"Will you give me two hundred pounds down for it?" cried Mrs Cornford, holding out her hand.

"On my word, that is too little. Do you get no more than that?" asked the baronet.

"Oh! you forget that I'm a woman, and have no R.A. at the end of my name. So you won't buy it," she added, smiling.

"I am no picture-buyer, madam, but I have picture-buying friends to whom I will name the matter."

"Send 'em here—send 'em all here," Polly said; "a picture to sell can't get too much praise—from the wise or the foolish."

And then Sir George very politely took his leave. He was determined to form no opinion on the matter of Mrs Cornford's disclosures till they had been communicated to Ella.

"A most extraordinary person that," he mused, as he walked back to Sloane Street; "so unpleasantly familiar, and yet evidently intending no harm. It would not be a bad speculation

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to buy that picture ; I'm sure it's worth double. Who would think that such a woman could paint a signboard ! ”

“ What a little prig, to be sure ! —but I took him in gloriously about the Himalayan Mountains,” said Polly ; and she assembled all her friends to laugh with her over the story.

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### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### KITTY TAKES COUNSEL OF HERSELF.

IN spite of their affection for each other, in spite of Ella's well-bred self-possession and Kitty's innate tact, the two girls were ill at ease during Sir George's absence. Just a touch of reserve, just a shade of coldness crept into the daily intercourse that had hitherto been so unalloyed and sweet to both ; and Arcachon seemed for the time a dreary, monotonous, unbeautiful place. Kitty made superhuman efforts to be merry, since she could not be cheerful. She would sing little serio-comic songs with all the gaiety of a gipsy, would dance an operatic *pas seul*, would caricature anybody and everybody, for Ella's amusement. Poor Ella felt grateful, but could not be amused even by Kitty, so great was her suspense, and so painful the necessity of reserve. “ Kitty is nobler than we,” was her hourly, almost momentary thought, “ and if I lose her, how blank, and unloved, and dreary my life will be ! ”

“ If I lose Ella,” thought Kitty, “ what beggar in all the world will be so poor, so friendless, so forlorn as I ? I am like the prodigal ; I cannot work, and to beg I am ashamed.”

She felt morally certain that Sir George's departure had something to do with herself. Was he determined to find out the nature of her past intercourse with Perry ? Was he suspicious concerning her career from the beginning ? What would he think, how would he act, if he knew all ?

At that thought Kitty would walk up and down her room,

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in a passion of indignation against the Fates for having used her so hardly.

"I have nothing to be ashamed of but my poverty," she thought, with extreme bitterness; "nothing—nothing. Who can accuse me of ever forgetting that I was a woman? When did my pride in my good name for a single instance forsake me? When was I guilty of a light word, or of an immodest action? Ella, who is pure as the angels, is not more pure than I; and yet, because I am poor, such reputation avails nothing. Oh! poverty, poverty! why do you not kill us outright, body and soul, rather than so torture us?"

But if Kitty's mind was in a ferment when she had only suspicion as the base for her uneasiness, what was her condition after reading the following letter from Mrs Cornford?

"PARADISE PLACE, Nov. 10th.

"DEAR MISS GOOD-FOR-NOTHING,

"A little, youngish-oldish, Jack-in-the-box-looking man, with as much hair on his face as would make two or three clothes-brushes, came here yesterday to inquire about you and your belongings. I gave the first thing in the way of a pedigree that came to my mind, and if he took it as true, he must blame himself for being a fool, and not me for taking him in. 'Treat a donkey like a donkey, or you'll soon see where you are for your pains,' that is my motto, Kitty; and a good one as far as my experience of donkeys goes.

"Well, I told the little wretch all this and much more, and praised you up, as a shopman praises up damaged goods he wants to get rid of. I wasn't going to be the ruin of you, though you have been the ruin of my poor Perry; for blood may be thicker than water, but if a motherless child you have taken care of isn't your relation, who is? And you're my relation still, Kitty; and if ever you want what you never get except from the best of friends, namely, a little money and a little plain speaking, count upon Polly Cornford. Your father was an Irish divine, remember that, and went to India as a

missionary, and died there, and is buried at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains ; and your mother was the daughter of the younger son of Sir Thomas Mistletoe—remember that, too ; and she was disinherited because she married a poor curate. Whatever you do, don't muddle the story.

“Now, didn’t I do my best for you ? And I said, also, that you were no more like us than a pretty little blue and pink bean that has slipped into a bushel of grey field-pease, or something of the kind—which is true ; whether the bean is the best of the lot is another question. But write to us, my dear. ‘Good luck divides the best of friends,’ says the dog who has stolen a bone, to his neighbour ; but it shan’t entirely divide us ; and though we don’t want your bone, we want to know how it tastes. Is it full of marrow ? Is it the best of bones ? How long will it last ?

“You needn’t grudge us this pleasure, for we’re not envious, Kitty, only a little inquisitive, as old friends always are. I hope you’ll be happy with the grand folks, that’s all. Fine feathers, here and there, make a very fine bird, and you’ll never let people find out that you are a jay instead of a peacock, I know. Are you quite comfortable in your borrowed finery ? Does it really fit ? And if it doesn’t fit, how does it feel ? Well, there’s no accounting for tastes, as the devil said when he saw the Scotch people listening to sermons two hours long !

“Good-bye, little daughter of Mammon.

“Yours ever,

“POLLY C.

“P.S.—Oh, dear ! I remember now that your father was an English parson ; pray don’t forget.”

Think of what Kitty must have felt as she read this letter ; picture, if you can, her rage, her terror, her mortification. Nothing as yet had happened so adverse to her fortunes as this ; and as she held the letter in her hand, looking like a ghost, it seemed too horrible to be true.

For a short time the blow paralysed her. She knew not

which way to move so as to prove a friend to herself; if, indeed, any harmless, much less expedient, course of action were possible. Sir George at Paradise Place ! Sir George, Mrs Cornford's confidant ! Sir George, a witness to the vagabondish, disreputable, unmitigated Bohemia in which she had been reared ! As she realised the full import of Mrs Cornford's letter, it seemed to her that the cup of her disaster was full to overflowing, and that her ruin was suddenly and irrevocably accomplished. When Ella came to know all, would she not feel contaminated by the mere touch of her finger-tips ? Would she not scorn her for having come to them under false colours ? Would she not part from her at once and for all ?

And if Ella cast her out now, who was there to take her in ? She had wronged Dr Norman past forgiveness ; she had wronged Perry past forgiveness ; she had felt so securely havened in Ella's affection that she had well-nigh wronged Myra past forgiveness. She could not dig, as she had said, and to beg she was ashamed. She sighed drearily as she glanced round her dainty little room, and said to herself, that whatever ills she could bear she could not bear poverty now. These soft cushions, these smooth-going carriages, these dainty meats and drinks, were as necessary to her as if she had been accustomed to them from infancy.

Poverty would soon kill me, I think, she said ; and if it did not, it would make life more hateful to me than death itself. Oh ! what shall I do ?

She sat still and pondered ; but thought did not help her. She walked up and down the room and railed at Fortune ; nor did that help her. At last she wept ; and when did not tears help a woman ?

Tears lightened her heart and cleared her vision. Having wept, she felt strong enough to make an effort on her own behalf, and to try whether she could not baffle mischance, as she had often baffled it before. Was she not a host in herself ? Was she not far-sighted beyond all the far-sighted people she knew ?

When she had calmly considered the question in all its bear-

'ings, she came to the conclusion that if she could mend matters at once, she could only do so by one means. She must tell Ella the truth, and throw herself upon her generosity. Ella loved her dearly ; a sister could hardly love her better ; and she was of a most constant, clinging, loyal, fervent nature. Would Ella tolerate the idea of her friend, her darling, her counsellor, going out into the unkind world alone ? Would not her affection for once conquer pride ?

Kitty was not well versed enough in the hearts of other women to feel sure on this point. She knew how generous men could be when they love ; but was the same spirit of sacrifice to be expected of a woman towards her friend ? It is true that they were dearer than most friends, and had loved to style each other 'sister ;' their affection had been based on mutual esteem and admiration ; their sympathies had drawn them nearer from day to day. Yet Kitty—who judged all women by herself—doubted.

The day on which Mrs Cornford's letter arrived was to be devoted to some acquaintances of Ella's, who were coming from Bourdeaux ; and thus the critical hour was put off for the present. Kitty bestirred herself on behalf of Ella's guests, as usual, arranged the breakfast-table, planned a charming excursion for the afternoon, helped Françine to pack cups and saucers for the pic-nic tea, and showed no sign of the form of anxiety burning within till all her work was done. Then she dropped into a chair and sighed a weary little sigh, and put her hand to her heart. Ella was not present, but a little later in the day she noticed her friend's pale looks ; and, though she dared not ask the reason of them,—having received an unsatisfactory letter from her father by the same post that had brought Mrs Cornford's, and naturally supposing that Kitty had heard from England also,—she contrived to manifest an extra solicitude. The party consisted of a widow lady and her four daughters—aristocratic, angular, amiable young ladies, who had doubtless been plump and pretty once, but were verging on the sere and yellow—nay, we will not be so impolite, the greenish-yellow leaf. It was a sad spectacle ; for these young ladies had been

brought up merely to be ornamental, and though they were now trying to take kindly to the more serious side of things—to interest themselves in hospitals for the sick, scientific studies, and so on—one could see that this philanthropic and scientific alacrity was not spontaneous. And then, though their mamma was a baronet's widow, they were terribly poor; and if aristocratic poverty is not a harrowing thing, what is? Their clothes were flimsy, and threadbare to the last degree; their shoes would not have withstood the first autumnal shower; their umbrellas were more fitted to keep their aristocratic heads cool than dry. It was a consoling thought that they were bound to the south, where people can go with the clothing that would suffice for statues, and take no harm.

"We intend to be so industrious in the Pyrenees," said the mother, glancing at the daughters. "Madeleine has become quite a botanist, and collects wherever she goes; Fanny paints in water-colours; Janet is the social economist of the family, and visits all the schools and orphanages by the way; and Constance and I are devoted to entomology. We found in Thun last summer the loveliest white snail you ever saw, as big as a mouse, and with the most knowing-looking horns."

"Indeed!" said Ella; "but I don't like snails at all. I could never call a snail lovely."

"Wait till you have a hobby, dear Ella, before you make fun of us," cried Constance. "Hobbies are the greatest boons the gods have provided as a compensation for all the ills which flesh is heir to."

"As if Ella had no hobby," said Lady Gardiner;—"who is without?"

"This is my hobby," answered Ella, laying her hand affectionately on Kitty's arm.

"And what is Miss Silver's hobby?" asked one of the ladies.

"Kitty's hobby," said Ella, very quickly, "is to be good to everybody."

Kitty coloured a little. Was there any satire in Ella's remark? She could hardly believe it, though it sounded more like satire than anything else; but then we know our own

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hearts so much better than our best friends know them ! Kitty and Ella were the very best friends. It was Set Fair on Ella's weather-glass when Kitty was by : it was Rain, Storm, and Much Rain when she was away. Kitty loved in a half humble, half lofty, protective fashion, that made her affection a staff for the gentle, sensitive, suffering Ella to lean on.

And yet how little did these two women read each other's thoughts ! How far were they from knowing each other's hearts ! On this particular day, for instance, they sat face to face in the same carriage, ate at the same table, called each other by the same sisterly names of endearment, whilst each had her own painful secret, and still more painful suspicion.

"How much does she guess ?" Ella asked herself again and again.

"How much does she know ?" was the thought uppermost in Kitty's mind.

And the ladies in the greenish-yellow leaf went into ladylike ecstacies over their several hobbies, and a merry tea was partaken of in the sweet-scented pine-forest, and the somewhat lengthy dinner came to an end, and at last Ella and Kitty found themselves alone.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### *WHAT KITTY SAID ON HER OWN BEHALF.*

THE pine-scented air had never seemed half so sweet as it did that evening ; soft breaths of flowers were blown from the garden ; the twilight sky wore the colour of lovely opals from east to west, and when they faded, great stars shone about the purple heavens. Kitty looked at the stars and said to her own heart, "Oh ! what has my miserable secret to do with a night like this ?"

These small domestic tragedies, which seem such trifles to write of, how hard are they to bear !

We hear of nation warring against nation, of awful catastrophes involving the sacrifice of hundreds of fellow-creatures,

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and set about our daily affairs as if nothing had happened ; but if anything has come between us and the person we love best in the world, what are we good for till all is made smooth again ? We could almost hide ourselves in some distant country, so heart-sore, heart-sick, wretched are we ! These sweet human affections, the best gifts Heaven has provided, must inevitably seem embittered and perplexing to us now and then ; and we can no more see the good in such bitterness and perplexity than children can see the good in things created with stings and fangs. But the good will doubtless be revealed one day.

It is easier to talk of painful matters at twilight, and as Ella rested on her sofa, and Kitty sat in her easy-chair opposite, she began in a low voice—

“Ella, I have something to say to you that lies on my heart like a lump of lead. I must get rid of the lump whilst we are alone.”

“Yes, dear,” Ella said, with plaintive resignation. She did not say, “Come close to me and say it, with your hand in mine,” as Kitty had hoped, but hardly expected.

“I take great blame to myself that I did not speak out long ago when we were first thrown together ; but I have always been such a coward where my affections are concerned ; and I soon grew to care for you more than for all my other friends,” Kitty went on very proudly and calmly ; “and you were very fond of me,—were you not ?”

“O Kitty ! how can you speak as if it were a thing past and done. I shall always care for you more than for any other friend.”

“I know that, and I knew it all along, and yet to speak out is to put a barrier of some sort between you and me. It is natural for people to like to be happy. I said I would be happy as long as I could, at any risk, and I have been as happy as I suppose few people ever are. That will be something to remember.”

Ella listened, trembling. What could she say ? What could she do ? She was beginning to suffer as much as Kitty. The

hardest thing of all was that they could not have out the story as children have out their quarrels, cheek to cheek and arms entwined. Ella was a child still where her affections were concerned, and she loved to be kissed and petted as children do ; Kitty had loved and petted her hitherto, but Kitty seemed getting farther away from her with every word. Poor Ella !

"The difference between your rank and mine ought to have made me frank," Kitty went on, "but we met on grounds of equality, and when two women love each other as sisters, what do they think of rank ? I never dreamed in those early days that our friendship would become in time so sweet and enduring a thing. I did not know you. I did not think that a day would come when I should wish to be your hired servant rather than nothing to you, and it has come now with a vengeance. I would rather be your hired servant, Ella, than reign supreme in a palace ; yet I must go—and you cannot, you must not hold me back."

Ella listened and said not a word. She had never before realised how much Kitty was to her. She took in at a glance all the misery that the loss of such a friend would bring upon her ; and yet she listened in silence.

"If I had acted fairly by you, when we first began to think of each other as dear friends, I should have made some such confession as the one I am going to make now, leaving you to not upon it as you think proper," Kitty said, and forthwith began her confession :—

"Well, I am a social gipsy ; born of them, bred among them, made love to by them. We lived like vagabonds on the face of the earth, taking no care for the morrow ; feasting one day, starving the next ; but we broke no laws except those of custom and comfort. The men were honest, the women were good, and a universal tie of kindness and charity bound them together. It was a merry life that we led in this Bohemia of ours, Ella, and as free from care as the life of the birds in the woods. If one of us wanted a shilling, a coat, or a loaf of bread, there were our neighbours', ready for us ; and towards myself the goodness was such as I should be wicked to forget.

It was not a life of inward, if of outward, vulgarity. We adored pictures, and music, and beautiful things, and often went without food to get a taste of them. Yet, as I grew to be a woman, I hated the life. I longed for softness and refinement, as other women long for finery and admiration. Perhaps it was because I came of gentle blood—so they told me—and the instinct of respectability was too strong for me. I felt like an alien, and I determined to elevate myself, some day or other, at any cost. I used to sit at home—a very Cinderella among the ashes—thinking, thinking ; scheming, scheming. I had no gifts ; that was the worst of it. I could act passably, but not well enough to go on the stage ; I could sing and play a little, but had no musical instinct in me ; I could not draw a line to save my life. My only natural gift seemed the art of acquiring popularity—I ought to say affection. People always liked me better than anybody else. It was as if, wherever I went, I exercised a magnetic influence ; and this often without any volition of my own. If we were dunned by some hard-hearted grocer or butcher, I went to him and talked him into waiting for his money a little longer. There was a poor old Pole in our little colony, a teacher of languages, who would go without bread to buy me sweetmeats. If Mrs Cornford's pupils brought little gifts of flowers or fruit, they were always presented to me. When one of them, Laura Norman, asked me to stay at her father's house in the country, and I went, of course Dr Norman, who was a widower of forty-five, fell in love with me ; and his son, a youth of nineteen, fell in love with me too ; and I had no more sought their love than I had sought the love of the others at home. In an ill-advised moment I consented to become Dr Norman's wife, and if Myra had not offered me a home with her I should have married him ; whether for good or evil I know not—I fancy for evil. You know how entirely Myra leaned upon me and looked up to me. I believe she would have given me the half of her fortune in her generous, impulsive affection ; and we were as happy together as two women can be, when the only tie that binds them together is that of helplessness on one side and capability on the other.

Myra is a mere child, as you know, and it was not likely that we should have much in common. Then I came to know you, and just when I have grown fonder of you than of all these lovers of mine—I must go. To lose the others pained me chiefly on their account; but to lose you, who have been my companion, my teacher, my ideal, is like going into a strange land, where I should be of no more account than thousands of forlorn emigrants. It is very hard," Kitty said, sorrowfully; "so hard that it leads me to doubt whether things are always ordered for the best," and she broke into a vehement, indignant sob.

Just then Francine entered with a little lamp, and Kitty saw by the light of it that Ella was crying also. In a moment she was at her friend's side, holding her little hands, calling her by pet names, and begging her to be comforted in a dozen loving phrases.

"Oh! life is so short. It must not, must not be!" Ella said, at last. "If I am dear to you, are you less dear to me? Stay with us, dear Kitty, at least whilst you are happy."

"How can I stay?" Kitty cried. "Are you not a high-born lady? Am not I a gipsy, a pariah? Ah! you do not yet know all," she added, without looking at her friend's face. "Sir George has seen these old protectors and companions of mine. He will not think I ought to sit down to table with you after that."

"Kitty," Ella said, "now it is my turn to make a confession; and you would never guess how ignoble it is. When I think of my own capabilities of littleness, I hate myself. It was I who instigated papa to act as he has done; I did it with a good intention. I wanted to offer you a home with papa and me, as long as you might find it a happy one; and it seemed as if I had no right to make the offer unless I was quite sure that nothing stood in the way of your future happiness and security."

She leaned forward, so that her head rested on Kitty's shoulder, and added, in a penitent, pathetic voice—

"Why can one's affections never be good and unselfish and unworldly—oh, why?"

"You wished me to stay with you always?" Kitty asked, breathlessly.

"Could anything else so good have happened to us both?" Ella said, with a sad smile. "You don't know how different papa's life and mine have been since you came to us. We were often quite tired of each other's company before."

Kitty's heart beat fast, but she listened in silence. It was very sweet to her to be so praised by Ella.

"Rank does not naturally imply refinement," Ella went on in the same plaintive voice; "you must have seen that for yourself; and littleness of every kind has been the bugbear of my life ever since I was a child. But there is no littleness in you that I could discover, and it breaks my heart to act meanly towards the person I most love and admire—in all the world," she cried, throwing her arms around her friend's neck. "O Kitty! why was I not also born a gipsy—as you call yourself?"

And she laughed and cried, and kissed Kitty as frantically as if that very moment they were going to be separated for ever and ever.

"Think what it would be for me to go back to a life without you! Women like me, who spend their days on the sofa, must live with women for the most part; and how dull they are! Oh, how dull they are! Fancy your poor Ella shut up with Constance Gardiner and her snails!"

The two girls laughed in the middle of their tears.

"Or with Madeleine and her dried plants," Ella went on, wiping her cheeks; "and they are exceptionally intelligent for the girls of my set, I assure you. There isn't anything like originality amongst them, poor things! Kitty, having fared sumptuously, I can't content myself with the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. I can't go down from Kitty Silver to the Miss Gardiners."

"But, dear," Kitty said, very thoughtfully and gravely, "if you really care for me so much, there need be no question of pride between you and me. I was too proud to accept Dr Nor-

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man's home, since I could not love him ; I was too proud to eat of Myra's bread without paying back in such kind as I could ; but I care more for you than for both of these, and I will not be proud now. Let me stay with you as your hired servant in the eyes of the world ; let me eat at a separate table ; let me play the dependant's part—I could do it easily—only let me stay. *I must stay !*"

Ella looked up, radiant with smiles and tears.

"As if I should accept such a sacrifice from you, you dear, generous, high-souled thing !" she cried, fervently. "But now I will tell you what I think it will be wisest for us to do. Having relieved our minds, we can afford to be happy again. Let us be happy for the present, and not take any trouble about the future. You understand what I mean," she said. "I'm determined that the happiness is to last, but I can do nothing till papa comes home. You are as free to act as the winds of heaven, but a girl living with her father is as dependent upon him as a baby."

"It is easy enough for me to be happy, now that I know how much you care for me," Kitty answered. "There is, after all, some consolation in being a social gipsy ; one is liked for one's own sake, and one naturally likes others for the same reason."

Then she rose from her station by the sofa, and began the usual evening amusement of reading aloud as if nothing had happened.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### *ANCHORED.*

EVERYTHING went merry as a marriage-bell till Sir George's return, which event naturally changed the course of things. Ella was determined to keep Kitty, and Kitty was determined to stay ; but Sir George must be umpire, and he was a very practical person ; concerning himself—not as they did, with

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high feelings and noble sentiments—but with expediency and the material bearings of the question.

He and Ella had a great many talks without coming to any conclusion whatever. Sir George was shocked at Ella's want of prudence and common sense ; at her recklessness in money matters ; at her wilful opposition to the line of action he chalked out for her. Nothing could be more ladylike and sensible, he urged, than to show carefulness regarding the disposal of one's income ; and Ella seemed determined to dispose of her income as carelessly as if she were a speculator.

"After all, my darling Ella," Sir George said, "I don't think you have adjusted the moral balance of the case as well as I have done. Every value in this world is a relative value ; and let us be as fond of Miss Silver as we may, we are only justified in giving her what her gifts and accomplishments would gain for her elsewhere."

"O papa ! as if I could think of Kitty in that way."

"You have never studied political economy, my dear, or it would come naturally to you. Society is made up of exchange, and each member is only entitled to give the real value of the thing he obtains. Now, our dear Miss Silver is a noble creature—I don't know another woman like her—but it will be a disadvantage to her through life that she comes of—well—of what class shall I say ?—of the people? And in offering her a home under our roof, we are bound to take that fact into consideration."

Ella's heart was swelling with indignation, but she loved her father too well, and was too used to such displays of feeling on his part, to take offence.

She merely said, colouring painfully whilst she spoke—

"Dear papa, we are only concerned with Kitty herself."

"Oh ! my dear, you wouldn't feel so about it if you had seen what I have seen."

And as Sir George recalled poor Polly Cornford's well-intended cordiality, he shrugged his shoulders. "That woman actually asked me to take a glass of Hollands !"

"But, dearest papa, we are not taking Mrs Cornford to live

with us. Kitty has of her own accord broken from such of her early connections as she deemed unsuitable ; and though she would always help her old friends if in trouble—which only an ungrateful person could refuse to do—she belongs as little to them as you or I."

"I admit that, my dear."

"Then we are only arguing in a circle," Ella continued, "and there is no more to be said."

Sir George fidgeted a little, as he always did before venturing upon a heterodox sentiment in his daughter's hearing.

"There is only this to be said : that if we make Miss Silver's allowance such as you propose, she will be receiving more than half the curates and vicars of England."

"If you think that I shall be behaving too generously to Kitty, she must go, papa, that is all," Ella said, coldly and firmly. "I will not accept the sacrifice of her freedom, her time, and her interests, for such a miserable pittance as you would hardly offer a nursery governess."

"Of course, you must do as you think proper, my dear."

So the matter ended.

Ella was happy ; Sir George grew reconciled to the loss of his money ; Kitty felt anchored at last.

She said to herself that she had guided the little craft of her destiny well through stormy seas and adverse weather, and that she had cast anchor in a happy haven. Would she ever be tempted to try another voyage ? Would she weary of this pleasant port ? She thought not. She hoped not. She was a little tired of sitting alone at the helm, and steering hither and thither in quest of good luck. Why could she not rest now?

Of the future she never thought. The life with Sir George and Ella seemed so agreeable and so suited to her that she settled down, for once, seeking nothing better, for once, hoping nothing beyond. Here she had the appliances of wealth, the society of cultivated people, plenty of money for her own uses, plenty of change, amusement, and admiration. Her spirits rose, her eyes grew brighter, her physical and mental powers

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developed themselves in this new atmosphere of prosperity. She felt as if she could not do enough for Sir George and Ella, for her old friends in Paradise Place, and for the whole world in general. She sent her poor old protégé, Papa Peter, who, she knew, was now infirm and almost wholly dependent upon Polly Cornford's bounty, a ten-pound note ; she sent Mimi, Tommie, and Binnie, each a necklace, and Polly a little gold brooch.

She would fain have showed some kindness to Dr Norman, but knew no way ; she did, however, send Christmas gifts to Laura and Prissy, thinking he would be pleased that his children should have a place in her memory still.

To a mind as active as Kitty's, it was infinitely preferable to find herself a member of the Bartelotte household, rather than a guest. Formerly the question had ever been—" Does Miss Silver like this ? " Now the question was—" Does Kitty think this quite the best thing for us to do ? "

Kitty's opinion, which was always given meekly, and rather as a tentative than as an opinion, generally led the way, and this supremacy could but be pleasant. Kitty, in fact, ruled the household. If the servants pleased Kitty, they pleased everybody. If a plan found favour in Kitty's eyes, Sir George ceased to discuss it with Ella. If Sir George proved fractious in money matters, Kitty had but to talk the matter over with him, and he grew tractable as a lamb.

Kitty, in truth, had found her vocation. She had not to do now, as in Myra's case, with a mind immeasurably inferior to her own, but with minds, if not her equals in some things, at least her superiors in others. She had not Ella's education as a lady ; she had not Sir George's education as a man of the world ; and to both Ella and Sir George she could look up by turns. They admired her for herself alone, and not as poor little Myra had done, for her versatility in things acquired.

It was not necessary for Kitty to shine here by the means of mushroom accomplishments. Mediocrity in ordinary feminine pursuits might well be permitted to one who was so lavishly gifted by nature ; and though Ella encouraged her to

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pursue the study of music, it was for Kitty's sake, not her own, since she only cared for music of the very best kind. Kitty, therefore, could rest on her oars.

She found herself in the happy position of an ambitious woman, who is told that to improve herself any more were but gilding refined gold and painting the lily. "Good heavens!" she would say to herself, and smile, "had I married Dr Norman he would have set me to the study of Greek and transcendental mathematics at least. Had I stayed with Myra, I must have gone on perfecting myself in all sorts of drawing-room accomplishments; had I stayed in Paradise Place, as Perry's wife, I must have learned how to cook the dinner and make a gown. From what miseries have I not escaped!"

She was good enough and clever enough for these new friends of hers. Why should they want her to be perfect? Sir George felt supreme contempt for any woman who openly set her judgment above his own, and the only weakness of Ella's sweet nature was that she loved to pose as a moral teacher. There was a fund of religious enthusiasm in her mind, nurtured on the works of German theologians and mystics, that could seldom find means of expression, much less sympathy. Sir George's religious notions consisted of going to church, which he always looked upon as a duty owed to society, and of giving subscriptions to clerical objects. The clergy ought to be paid, he used to say nevertheless with relish, according to the Buddhist law: only the eloquent preachers getting clarified butter, honey, and sugar, and the dull and long-winded going off with a bare allowance of paddy. But he sat out the dreariest sermons with equanimity, regarding it as a sort of penance which would make up for shortcomings in other respects. Had he been on his dying bed, he would have summoned a priest to administer the last communion, regarding the priest all the while as a very poor creature indeed, and laughing in his sleeve at the idea of having limited his burial fees by testament.

Poor Ella was, therefore, only casting her pearls before swine when quoting some beautiful thought of Jeremy Taylor and

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Edward Irving to her father. But even theological pearls were not wasted on Kitty. What a lesson on pearls and swine does such a person as Kitty read us ! She was always on the look-out for pearls, and grew richer and plumper every day ; whilst we, like the poor stupid swine, content ourselves with the acorns of the field.

As long as Ella would talk, Kitty would listen, till she knew so much about the points at issue between Strauss and Rénan, and the schools of the day, that she might have taken a first-class medal in an examination on modern theology and its teachers.

Examinations were far from Kitty's thoughts, though she liked to learn what Ella wished to teach her. Ella knew that she had no religion, and was sure to insist upon her having a religion one day ; but that question was not mooted yet, and Kitty hoped that it might not be mooted for a very long time.

So long as Ella seemed satisfied with the progress of her theological education, it was enough. Ella was not really satisfied, and regarded Kitty as a lost sheep that it was her felicitous destiny to gather to the fold of her orthodoxy at some time or other. For the present she could wait.

There were soon new ties of interest arising between the two girls. It was not like lying on a bed of roses to be the daughter of a man like Sir George Bartelotte, and Kitty was the first friend to whom Ella had confided her domestic discontents. Hitherto there had ever been a delicate reserve on both sides regarding this matter. Ella would never make comments, and Kitty would be blind and deaf whenever Sir George made himself unpleasant by interference in effeminate trifles. Now, the veil was dropped on both sides.

" Why should I mind telling you anything ? " Ella said— " you are as devoted to papa as if you were his daughter, and cannot help seeing his little faults."

" And do I keep any secrets from you ? " Kitty made answer.

So no secrets were kept on either side, and Ella grew doubly patient with her father's whims, having some one always at

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hand to sympathise, to counsel, or to laugh and cry with her, as the case might be.

Of course it was Kitty's fate to be now and then *désillusioné*, as the French say. Her aspirations after refinement had been a little disappointed at Dr Norman's house and Myra's also ; but had not Ella's mother been the granddaughter of an earl, and was not Ella's father a baronet, the cousin of peers of the realm ? Surely here, if anywhere, the atmosphere would be composed of aristocratic nitrogen, oxygen, *pur et simple*, totally unalloyed by proletarian elements.

She confessed to herself that Sir George often uttered sentiments, the moral vulgarity of which would have shocked even Polly Cornford. He never violated the rules of grammar ; he never used coarse expressions, but the mean little thought was none the less evident, the unmanly or illiberal opinion none the less repulsive.

Ella was perfectly refined ; was she more so in thought or deed than the hard-working little photographers, Vittoria and her sister, or the unsophisticated Laura ?

Time was teaching Kitty many things in which she had been hitherto childishly, egregiously ignorant. Amongst others, it was teaching her the pith of that excellent old maxim—All is not gold that glitters.

But then so long as the glitter was there, Kitty did not much concern herself about the gold ; the first was enough to make her happy.

At this period of her history, she was very happy ; at least she thought so.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE JOURNEY SOUTH.

WITH the first touch of briskness in the air, Ella began to cough ; and the physician said she must go farther south. After some discussion Malaga was decided upon, partly because a friend of Sir George's had offered him the loan of a house

there, and partly because Ella had never yet set foot on Spanish ground. So the preparations were made, and the journey was accomplished by means of Kitty's and Sir George's combined forces, with wonderful comfort and tolerable economy.

They travelled first-class of course, and took with them a courier, a page, and two maids ; which fact inspired even the phlegmatic Spanish innkeepers with something like awe. Wherever they went the best hotels were selected, Sir George settling the tariff of every expense on arrival. Compared to poor Perry's journey over the same ground a few weeks back, this was like a pompous progress of royal personages. Yet who would not rather have been Perry's companion, and seen with Perry's eyes ?

Wherever cathedrals, or picture-galleries, or ruins were to be seen, Kitty went, escorted by Sir George and the courier. Sir George knew a great deal about architecture and antiquities, something also of pictures, and did his best to inform Kitty. But nothing could possibly have been duller, Kitty thought, though she very carefully concealed her sentiments. Sir George saw everything that was to be seen for his money, tired himself and his companion to death rather than let cicerones cheat him of a real, and had not the faintest notion that where he saw dry bones only, other people made the dry bones to live.

When Kitty came home from these excursions she made the dry bones to live, indeed, for Ella's benefit. She had not the fine insight into the innermost soul of beautiful things that Perry, the Bianchis, and even brusque, noisy, talking Polly possessed so largely ; but she had a keen sense of outward harmony and perfection, and transcribed her experiences and impressions to Ella with marvellous vivacity and colour.

Wherever they took up their residence for any time, they made use of letters of introduction ; and these furnished a little diversion much more in Kitty's way than sight-seeing. Men and women interested her much more than things ; she could never see too much of such society as she could

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see intimately, no matter whether it was composed of the salt of the earth or not.

“How you read people’s characters!” Ella would say, half in admiration, half in alarm. “I feel quite afraid of you! I am sure no one has a weakness that you do not discover.”

Which was quite true; but the fact need not have rendered Kitty awful in anybody’s eyes, since she took no weakness amiss.

At Malaga they settled down for several months, in a prettily-situated villa outside the town. It happened that a great many English and other tourists had flocked thither that season, and Kitty and Ella might have been as gay as they pleased. Sir George always selected foreign society, on principles of economy; it cost a great deal less in the matter of eating and drinking. Ella selected it on aesthetic grounds, finding the ordinary run of foreign tourists more cultivated and polished than English ones. Their guests were mostly French, with a sprinkling of English and Americans; and, as is always the case in small societies abroad, people saw a great deal of each other. There is very little sight-seeing in Malaga; so that after the first week or two, visitors settled down to such routine as best suited their tastes and habits; in unison, according to the rules of social natural selection, with those acquaintances who best suited them.

Kitty’s special gift was that of organising social life, and making it agreeable. No wonder she was so loved and courted, and adored in this weary work-a-day world, where, for the most part, poor everyday human existence is left to itself,—unbeautified and uncared for.

Perfected capacity, however, like genius, entails responsibilities on the possessor, and Kitty soon found her excess of popularity becoming a burden. At Shelley House she had been the adoration of a simple-hearted family only; at Myra’s house, the adoration of Myra, and of no one else; at Fontainebleau, the adoration of a very small circle indeed. Here the case was very different. The winter residents at Malaga numbered half a score of families, and though Kitty did not stand on an

equal pinnacle of favour with all, she was universally acknowledged to be the leading spirit of the little society. The Gardiners were there, and the versatile Mr Tyrrell, who had been at Fontainebleau, was there, enjoying life as much as ever.

Among new acquaintances, a certain Baron de Fontanié must be mentioned. Kitty had never seen any one at all like the Baron de Fontanié before. He was not young, and certainly not handsome in the ordinary acceptation of the word ; but he had what goes much farther in the world than good looks—namely, distinguished manners and the quality of worldly-wise amiability, in almost equal proportion with Kitty herself.

He possessed only the ordinary accomplishments of a gentleman—could neither sketch like Mr Tyrrell, nor shoot and hunt like Captain Longley ; but he had held a diplomatic appointment at one of the principal courts of Europe, and combined a rare knowledge of the world with what Emerson calls “the happiest way of doing things.”

It was natural that a man like the Baron de Fontanié, who was rich, unmarried, and agreeable, should be sought after in a society of which several were young ladies, and ladies neither young nor old, to whom the fact of his bachelorhood was a pleasant subject to speculate upon. Kitty did not speculate upon it ; she was quite satisfied with her lot as she had chosen it just then, and did not want to make an exchange of certainties for uncertainties. The baron found her the most charming woman, and the most attractive companion of any in the place ; so, without the least sentimentality on the one side, or coquetry on the other, sprang up a friendship, or rather comradeship, as new as it was delightful to both. This frank liking could not be set down as flirtation by outsiders. Whenever an excursion was formed, the baron contrived to place himself in the same carriage with Kitty. If a hill were climbed, he proffered his arm to her before any one else had time to do so. As much deference as society permits a man to show to any lady whose mere acquaintance he is, the baron showed Kitty.

Ella, who was as unselfish as a woman can be, delighted to

see her friend's life made pleasant by this new element in it. The two girls talked of the baron and of his marked liking for Kitty, with a perfect frankness, and laughed at the foolish little world of Malaga for calling it by any other name.

"Oh ! dear," Kitty said one day, "it makes me laugh and cry in a breath to see how one's best friends misunderstand one ! Actually, Sir George is angry with me now, and all because of the baron."

"And the Gardiners are in a pet with us both—and all because of the baron !" laughed Ella.

"And Mr Tyrrell is not a bit like himself, and all because of the baron !" echoed Kitty.

"And we shall have to cast our tents and be off and away, and all because of the baron !"

"O Ella !"

Kitty looked so unmistakably aghast that Ella could not forbear smiling a roguish smile.

"Of course we won't leave Malaga, my dear, if"—

She put her arm round her friend, and looked into her eyes, inquisitively, before finishing her sentence.

"If the baron's friendship for you is likely to become anything more serious, and you are his ally," she said.

"Ella !" Kitty said, in her superior sort of way, "I am no more in love with the baron than I was with Dr Norman ; and he is no more in love with me than he is with any one of the Gardiners."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"But I am sure of it. As if a woman of sense couldn't tell whether a man's liking for her was a dangerous liking or no ! Now, the baron's liking is a safe liking, and it is very meddlesome of people to concern themselves with it to our mutual discomfort. I hate Bohemia and its ways ; but the spirit of liberty that prevailed there had something really good about it, and moral too. It prevented pettiness."

And Miss Kitty held up her handsome head, and looked exceedingly dignified.

"Why should anything like friendship be quite impossible

between men and women in respectable society ? " she said. " Love is like eating Dead Sea apples ; but friendship—a less enticing and far wholer fruit—should be freely permitted to all. How seldom one can taste it ! There was Dr Norman, whom, as a friend, I love with all my heart ; why could he not let matters rest so ? There is the baron, whose acquaintance is very, very pleasant ; why may I not have it ? "

" Because he is sure to fall in love with you."

" Indeed, and indeed, he will do no such thing."

" Did not Mr Perugino ? Did not Dr Norman's son ? Did not Dr Norman ? "

" And these are but three out of the many men I have known intimately ! You don't know the world as I do, Ella. It will always be the shy, homely, helpless Dr Norman, and the poor good-for-nothing Peruginos, who will want me to marry them to the end of the chapter, and not the rich, brilliant Tyrrells, or the polished, aristocratic barons with a dozen decorations. Men of their stamp invariably prefer a different type of women—the angels, in fact ; whilst the others fall on their knees before the first strongly-marked feminine character they meet."

" There are exceptions to every rule ; and certainly the baron has shown himself very devoted to you."

" Do let us go into the garden, and eat some custard apples, by way of a refreshment," Kitty said, coaxingly ; " I feel in such a very bad temper."

And the two girls said no more about the baron that day.

Finding Kitty so sore on the subject, Ella felt afraid to recur to it of her own accord, though sadly anxious to speak the thought uppermost in her mind.

What if Kitty's indignant protest against the gossip of society covered a deep feeling, which she would not bring herself to confess even to her dearest friend ? What if Kitty's heart was really touched at last, and she loved the baron ?

What if the baron wished to make her his wife ? An indescribable sense of fear took possession of Ella's mind, and there rested. Was this sweet new gift of Heaven to be short-lived as the joy of a butterfly's existence on a summer day ?

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To this friendless, sisterless, motherless girl, Kitty's friendship had come as the return of health to the sick, as an accession of wealth to the poverty-stricken, as the unexpected advent of children to the childless. Kitty seemed to fill the place of friend, sister, mother, all in one ; and Ella had rested on her strong affection, thankful to heaven for the boon, and asking no other.

She now realised on what frail tenure her lease of happiness was held. Kitty loved her like a sister, but Kitty was young, clever, beautiful ; who so likely to marry in all the world as she ?

Again, was not the advantage of this compact of friendship chiefly advantageous to her father and herself ?

They gave Kitty the grosser necessaries of life—shelter, food, and the wherewithal to be clothed ; she gave in return what money cannot purchase, what even affection cannot command—namely, rare gifts of a rare mind, and the wealth of the sweetest disposition in the world. Beautiful, winning, adorable Kitty ! How should they bear to lose her ? How should they pass their lives without her ?

Ella pondered on this question during the silent hours of the night, and came to the conclusion that nothing should induce her to act a selfish part towards her friend in this emergency ; that anything in the world should be sacrificed rather than Kitty's happiness.

If the baron desired to marry Kitty, and Kitty desired to marry the baron, she would dispose of part of her little property, rather than Kitty should go without some sort of dowry. She would move Heaven and earth rather than put an obstacle in the way of the marriage.

Ella was one woman out of hundreds, for she could have a friend of her own sex and not be jealous.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

"THAT CONFOUNDED FRENCHMAN!"

SIR GEORGE'S temper was not improved by the spectacle of the baron sitting at Kitty's feet. When everything went smoothly, his temper could hardly be called angelic ; but the baron's frank liking for Kitty, and Kitty's frank liking for the baron, irritated him to a pitch that would seem in the highest degree unreasonable. If he did not wish himself to pay court to Kitty, what conceivable, or at any rate admissible, objection could he have to any other man paying court to her ? Did he consider the baron too good for Kitty, or Kitty too good for the baron ? Was he only anxious on Ella's account, foreseeing the desolation that Kitty's marriage would inevitably bring upon her ? Was he only anxious on his own account, dreading to lose the society he so much liked and admired ?

If none of these motives lay at the bottom of Sir George's strange conduct, how was it to be accounted for ? Not an excursion, not a breakfast, not a pic-nic tea, but was spoiled by his captiousness in little things. The party was sure to be arranged too late in the day, or too early ; or too many people had been invited ; or the wrong place had been fixed upon ; or the horses were wretched hacks, and he would not trust his neck to them.

Lady Gardiner used to say, *sotto voce*, to her daughters at the place of meeting, "Poor Sir George is as cross as ever to-day;" —one could tell if he were cross or not in a moment by the sound of his voice, and the baron would say to Kitty under cover of her parasol—

"I could pitch that fractious little animal out of the window with the greatest possible pleasure."

Whereupon Kitty looked greatly shocked. To think of the father of her friend being called "*petit animal*" was too terrible, and she scolded the baron in a way that he found extremely delightful. Kitty, moreover, liked Sir George, and had done her utmost to slight him in no way, whilst receiving the plea-

sant attentions of a man so suited to her in every way as the Baron de Fontanié.

Sir George tried to keep his ill-humour from affecting Ella's enjoyment, but of necessity she felt it more than any one. She loved and respected her father, and to find him making himself ridiculous, grew so intolerable, that at last she spoke out.

"Dear papa," she said, affectionately, "if the worst comes to the worst, and we lose our Kitty, of what use to fret ourselves to death about it? She is not your daughter; she is not my sister; and if she were, we could not expect her to give up a happy marriage for our sakes. Being only our friend, we have no right to expect anything—except her friendship always—and her company as long as she will stay with us."

"You are putting much too fine a point upon it," answered Sir George, with difficulty concealing his impatience. "Miss Silver's engagement with us was made in a business-like way, and it ought so to be kept. It shall so be kept"—

"Papa, dear"—

"Yes, my dear, I know exactly what you will say. You will argue as if every one of us were made up of angelic affection like yourself; but we are not. Miss Silver is human—I am human—that confounded Frenchman is human"—

Ella burst out laughing.

"The poor baron! But what has he to do with any private arrangements Kitty may have made with us? In the eyes of the world, she is a member of our family."

"My darling, you speak of Kitty Silver as if she were an ordinary girl; but you wholly lose sight of her extraordinary powers of mind, her insight into character, her judgment, her discrimination. Now, do you suppose for a moment, Ella, that that—ahem—I beg your pardon—Frenchman is as blind as a bat?"

Utterly losing the clue of her father's discourse, Ella let him go on, for the life of her unable to restrain a genuine laugh now and then. What an odd figure he must have looked to a stranger, she thought, as she surveyed him from her sofa! He never rested in the same attitude for a moment, and as he

waxed more and more wrathful, his face seemed to grow smaller and more monkey-like, his eyes brighter and rounder, whilst his black hair was shaken like the mane of some enraged little animal.

Ella loved her father devotedly, but she wished sometimes in her secret heart that Providence had made him a little more dignified.

"You don't divine my meaning?" he asked, very brusquely.

"Not in the least, papa."

"That Fontanié is a diplomatist, and has just returned from Berlin, where he has, doubtless, brewed mischief enough. Just think of what a wife like Miss Silver would be worth to him!—oh! he's as deep as Louis Napoleon himself—I know those Frenchmen."

Ella listened with wide open eyes. What will-o'-the-wisp would her father think he had seen next?

"A man like that, my dear," Sir George went on, "doesn't want a rich woman or a titled woman for his wife. He may think himself deucedly lucky—wonderfully lucky, to get a clever woman like Miss Silver without so much as a halfpenny!—or with no more pretensions to a pedigree than an orange-seller picked out of the street."

"Dear papa!"

"Don't be shocked at the comparison. I mean nothing disrespectful towards Miss Silver. But you must see my meaning. Miss Silver, with her brains and her wonderful art of reading character, and the power she involuntarily exercises over everybody with whom she comes in contact, would be worth a dukedom to a man like that—the cat's-paw of some statesman or other, for all we know—the paid intriguer of some German court, the"—

"The poor baron!" cried Ella, laughing in spite of herself. "Do you really think he deserves to be called such hard names, papa?"

"I don't know what he deserves, or what he doesn't deserve," Sir George said, still very wrathful; "but he shall not marry Miss Silver. I tell you, Ella, he shall not. If I have to fight a duel with him, he shall not."

"Perhaps the baron does not wish to marry her, after all," Ella said ; "and Kitty is so fond of us and so unselfish, that I believe she would make any sacrifice rather than make us unhappy"—

"She would be most ungrateful if she were not ready to make any sacrifice—most ungrateful—as women generally are."

"Indeed, papa," Ella went on, with a quiet current of displeasure underlying her gentle words. "I don't in the least agree with you there. I should deeply grieve to lose Kitty, but I should rejoice to see her married to a man she really cared for. And to put any obstacle in the way of such a marriage would be little short of wickedness."

"Of course, I don't want to do anything wicked," Sir George said, doggedly. "I've never done anything wicked in my life hitherto that I know of, and I should be sorry to begin at my age. But if that confounded Frenchman goes and makes love to Miss Silver, nothing in the world shall prevent me from kicking him out of the house."

And, suiting the action to the words, Sir George proceeded to kick, from one end of the room to the other, a very harmless-looking sofa-cushion that happened to lie on the floor ; and when he had done the same thing twice over, he walked away, almost as much relieved as if the cushion had been the body of the baron himself.

Ella hardly knew whether to laugh or cry at this new turn of affairs ; she was too used to small exhibitions of temper on her father's part to think much of this one, excepting in so far as it related to Kitty.

What if the amount of admiration Kitty received should draw upon her Sir George's dislike ?

What if Sir George should set himself wilfully to prevent Kitty's marriage with the baron, provided the baron and Kitty agreed upon marriage ?

Ella was sorely puzzled how to act so as to prevent either catastrophe, or any unforeseen plan that might be brewing in her father's mind inimical to Kitty's happiness.

If only the baron would speak out or go away !  
She was Kitty's dearest friend ; could she speak to the  
baron ? She decided that she could not.

Poor little Ella ! She was too young as yet—numbering only twenty summers—and too feeble to deal with these obstinate, perplexing circumstances. As she lay on her sofa, so pale, so blonde, so *mignonne*, as the French would say, she only wanted a golden harp and wings to look like an angel "dressed for heaven;" and one instinctively felt that the harder business of life was very little fitted for her, and that the position of being Sir George's daughter was not fitted for her at all.

But no matter what a woman may be—a seraph or a virago, a saint or a sinner—she is almost sure to possess the feminine quality of tact ; and Ella had managed to keep Sir George's undesirable idiosyncrasies wonderfully in the background hitherto. She could not feel sure of being able to do so now, and the thought was a distressing one. She could bear to lose Kitty, her newly-acquired, highly-cherished treasure—her pearl beyond all price ; but she could not bear to have anything cloud their most sweet friendship; and would not Sir George's unpleasant conduct cloud it ? If her father persisted in persecuting Kitty, she could be her defender, but she could hardly be her partisan.

As she lay thinking these sad thoughts, and sighing to herself, after the manner of women, that the sweetness of life should be so short-lived, in came the Apple of Discord—Kitty's bright, bewitching, indescribable self ! Never were two women better contrasted : the one possessed of a magnificent physique, of an elastic character, so adapted to the exigencies of human life as it is, possessed of so many nascent charms and capabilities ; the other all delicacy and softness, and almost infantine loveliness and purity of look and temperament, and quite unfitted for intercourse with any but "the élite of humanity," though the leaven that leaveneth the lump of society with it is but small.

"We have had such a pleasant drive," began Kitty, in a

flow of spirits. "I hardly think you would have found it fatiguing. See, I have brought you home a pretty sketch, made on the spot for your album by Mr Tyrrell and the baron"—

The words were fairly on her lips as Sir George entered the room; but no sooner had he heard them than he said, snapishly—

"Always that confounded Frenchman! When you have finished talking about him, Miss Silver, perhaps you will listen to what I have to say."

And with that he slammed the door to very violently, and went away.

"Oh, dear!" said Ella, as soon as he was fairly out of hearing. "What can we do to make poor papa more amiable?"

Kitty sympathised and suggested, but she did not say, "Let us leave Malaga," which step Ella felt in her secret heart to be the only panacea for the evil.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### GOOD NEWS.

IT is a question whether the noblest and bravest of us could long support the small vexations that will disturb even the best-ordered life without the stimulus of a pleasant surprise. Wise men and good women can doubtless do a great deal towards preventing sordid or unworthy elements from spoiling the harmony of daily existence; but who can command those happy accidents upon which we are all so dependent? We learn—ah, how bitterly!—the mirage-like nature of anticipated joy; but happiness that comes to us as unexpectedly as treasure-trove, how good and reviving and blessed it is! We may respect our preachers, but let those who like listen to the best sermon that ever was preached, and give me for my soul's good a sudden piece of welcome news instead!

Whilst poor Ella was pondering upon the numerous vexations cropping up in her daily path in consequence of her

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father's intractable temper, an unseen force was at work that would for the time turn the lion into a lamb. A snarling terrier turned into a placid parlour cat would be a more fitting simile; but a baronet is a baronet, and must not be taken liberties with, even in jest.

It must be mentioned, then, that Sir George's temper had been of late years tried amongst other things by a lawsuit. This lawsuit was, as usual, an affair of very long standing; so long, indeed, that it had settled itself down in Sir George's life as a sort of chronic ailment or inconvenience to which one submits with a bad grace. He sometimes wished that the matter might never come to an end, so sorely did he dread the idea of defeat.

The question was one involving twenty thousand pounds, however; and when news came one morning that he was master of the field, he hardly knew how to keep his exultation within decorous, much less dignified, bounds.

The two girls were sitting in their pretty summer-house, looking across the orange-trees at the beautiful purple mountains, and talking over their needlework, very likely of the baron,—only Sir George had no ears just then,—when he rushed in, flourishing a letter over his head, his teeth chattering with excitement, his black hair blown about his eyes, which were like the bright little eyes of a terrier who smells pleasant prey.

“I've gained it!—I've gained it!” he cried, throwing the letter on the table, and taking it up the next moment, as if it was too precious to be out of his hands. “I've gained it!”

Then he laughed, almost a maniacal laugh, kissed Ella, and shook hands with Kitty. When the first preliminaries of congratulations were got through, Kitty, with her usual tact, left father and daughter alone. Sir George looked up, as much as to say, “Oh! what can it matter who hears about a lawsuit that has put twenty thousand pounds in my pocket!”

Ella looked up as much as to say, “As if we had secrets from you.” But Kitty's tact was never at fault. She was, in truth, an epicure where her friendships were concerned, never

accepting immoderately of the good things her adorers offered her, never taking an ell if they offered several inches. "Custom cannot stale the infinite variety" of a person so rich in gifts and graces, and so temperate in using the tribute paid to them.

So Kitty smiled and nodded to her friend ; and, pretending that she wanted to write some letters that very minute, left them to their cheerful little tête-à-tête.

" Dear papa ! " cried Ella ; " what a weight off your mind ! I am so glad ! "

" But it makes such a difference in our income. In fact, it makes all the difference," Sir George went on, now grown quite calm and collected. " We need not keep away from England all the year round, as if we were dunned—not that I like England, it's growing so abominably democratic ; but you should be in London for a season now and then."

" Kitty would no doubt like it," Ella said, reflectively ; " and I should like it, for some things."

" Or we might go down to Akenholme Park—I want very much to get my books re-catalogued. I shall put up a memorial window to your mother in the church now, Ella ; and, oh ! my darling, I could die with an easy mind any minute, for you will have enough to live upon ! "

Sir George's eyes were actually full of tears just then, but the next moment he was laughing again exultingly.

" It's about the only piece of good luck that ever overtook me in my life," he went on ; " isn't it ? All my labourers' wives bore them sons, but no boy was ever born to me. Your dear mother died when we were both in the heyday of our youth. In the matter of property, how shamefully did my uncles and aunts treat me ! In fact, without wishing to find fault with Providence, I must say I've been all along more hardly used than my neighbours, though I'm a good churchman, and lead a proper sort of life."

" But now," said Ella, affectionately, for she was too used to her father's somewhat pompous show of orthodoxy to be shocked by it, " all will be well with us ; and if we are not

contented and pleasant, and charitable to our neighbours, there will be no excuse."

The last sentence was uttered very slyly, and, as may naturally be supposed, had reference to the baron. The cap fitted.

"I should be charitable enough to people if they minded their own business," Sir George said; "but if that prig of a Frenchman comes dangling after Kitty, I'll pitch him out of the window without the least compunction."

This speech was, however, uttered more in jest than in earnest, and wholly wanted the acrimony of former speeches made to the same purpose.

"Papa, now you have got your cake, we shall expect you to be good, and not to get cross with anybody."

"Don't you think the best thing we can do is to leave Malaga?" Sir George said, maliciously. "It would serve them both right."

"Both, papa? How can you utter anything half so unparable? Kitty has done nothing wrong."

"She hasn't done anything wrong; but the whole thing—the flirtation"—

"O papa!"

"Well, call it what you will; the whole thing has been carried quite far enough to spoil our enjoyment. If I want Miss Silver to write a letter for me—which she says she likes doing—where is she to be found? In the company of the baron. If we plan a pleasant drive, who is favoured with her conversation? The baron. She neglects even you for that confounded Frenchman, and I won't put up with it!"

But Ella went back to the subject of the twenty thousand pounds, and brought out all the salient points of it with so much discretion, that Sir George's heart softened towards the whole world in general, and poor Kitty in particular, and he promised to treat her more leniently in future.

For the few days following Sir George was highly busy in consequence of his newly acquired property, writing letters, making calculations as to investments, and so on. Ella advised

him slyly to go to England. Kitty advised him to go too, in her business-like, superior sort of way ; but he declared that nothing in the world should induce him to make the journey just then ; and the two girls laughed over his motive in secret. It was plain enough that he preferred to stay in Malaga, and be, in vulgar phraseology, the plague of Kitty's life. But in all other particulars, Sir George was, as we have said, suddenly turned into a lamb. He would chuckle to himself when alone, to think how much everybody wanted him to be gone, and how he did not choose to be gone ; and he teased Kitty about her preference for the baron ; and he teased the baron about his preference for Kitty, though in a good-tempered gentlemanlike way, without any of his former acrimony. Under this new influence Malaga became for a time as pleasant as it had first been. When, indeed, did not twenty thousand pounds cause the wilderness to blossom as the rose ?

Kitty was treated by her fiery little patron very much as a spoiled child at this epoch. If she was scolded and punished one moment, she was sure to receive sugar-plums the next. One day it was a pretty silk scarf Sir George gave her ; another, a Spanish fan; neither of them costly gifts, certainly, but astounding as gifts from him. He used to apologise for this new kind of spasmodic generosity to Ella, by saying that he had never showed his appreciation of Kitty's devotion to her during her illness ; and that it was high time to do so now.

One day, when he had been unusually provocative and unusually generous, having presented her with a pair of Malaga figures in coloured terra-cotta, of the value of twenty francs, Kitty made a show of depreciation.

" You are really too good, Sir George," she said. " I feel quite ashamed to take so many gifts from you."

" I am sure you deserve them," he answered, rather bluntly.

" Indeed I deserve nothing."

He looked up, with a curious mixture of admiration, curiosity, and dismay.

" There is nothing in the world I would not give you," he said, in an eager undertone. " On my soul, nothing ! "

Then, seeing that she blushed and dropped her eyelids, as much disconcerted by the manner as the matter of his speech, he added—

"And I tell you once and for all, that if you marry that confounded Frenchman, I shall be the most miserable beggar on the face of the earth."

He looked at her sharply for a minute, as much as to say, "If that confession does not take you aback, nothing will," and went away.

When she was alone, Kitty closed the door softly, and walked up and down the room, colouring, smiling, almost laughing to herself at this unexpected turn of affairs. So utterly astounded and amused was she, that she could not restrain one or two little ejaculations—ejaculations not perhaps self-congratulatory, but certainly not expressive of displeasure.

"What next?" she said, as she thought of Sir George being in love with her.

What next, indeed?

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

KITTY, of course, kept her own counsel about this little declaration of feeling on Sir George's part; but she did not forget it, and acted very warily during the few days that followed. She came to no conclusion as to the future. She did not say to herself, "Under such circumstances I will do this or that." She did not vex herself with contemplating the probable perplexities that this new turn of affairs must surely bring. She merely smiled and waited, as smiles and waits the contented angler, asking of the Fates—What next?

Her behaviour to her new adorer was admirable. In the society of others it was precisely her ordinary behaviour, not even Ella noticing a difference; but when alone with Sir George, which happened pretty often, she manifested a womanlike, ladylike show of embarrassment, would evade a tête-à-tête,

would make a pretext for running away, would, in fact, behave as any modest girl behaves to a man who is more than a friend and not quite a lover. Sir George found her more bewitching than ever, but he lacked courage to say so, feeling as yet too frightened at his first piece of audacity to venture upon repeating it. Towards the baron Kitty showed the same frank liking, perhaps a little, though a very little, modified ; but not sufficiently so as to attract notice. She had all along felt sure that the baron's friendship for her was a safe one, and, alone in the world of Malaga, refused to consider him as a lover ; which conduct reflected great credit on Kitty's perception, seeing that time wore on, and the baron's devotion remained stationary.

Matters stood thus, when it happened that a little pic-nic was planned to a convent on the hills ; and that the baron, for some cause or other, was prevented from going. The fact of his absence piqued Kitty as much as it exhilarated Sir George.

"I would rather Monsieur Fontanié should not be in love with me," Kitty mused ; "but then the comradeship, of which he talks so much, must be neither cold nor hot, or he would join us to-day."

"He thinks he is so sure of her, that he can leave off dancing attendance just when he likes," Sir George thought to himself ; "but he may find out that he has made a mistake, the conceited ass !"

Now, the baron was as far from being a conceited ass as any man in the four seas ; but if we wish for a correct estimation of ourselves we must go to our superiors for it, and Sir George was not his superior. Perhaps the baronet would not have been flattered by the baron's equally candid opinion of him—though, in truth, it was far from being very depreciatory. It may be safely affirmed that the faculty of contempt diminishes in proportion as we grow wiser, and the baron had been growing wiser for many years.

Kitty, as has been said, was exceedingly piqued by the baron's absence from the pic-nic, and determined to punish him for his defalcation, when opportunity offered. It is a question whether such a pleasant thing as friendship can long exist

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between unmarried men and women, even of exceptionally well-balanced characters. Wise though they may be, they cannot unsex themselves, and the man will behave like a lover and the woman like a coquette upon the first semblance of a quarrel.

So Kitty dressed herself in the daintiest summer costume—it always seemed summer-time in Malaga—and started in search of pleasure with the others, feeling just a little mortified at her friend's neglect. Neglect was a novel thing to her, and though she had entreated for it at the hands of Dr Norman and Perry, she did not find the reality pleasant. Certainly, undue admiration is easier to bear than ever so small a slight, she said to herself, and wished to compensate her ill-used lovers for what they had endured from her own cruelty at that very moment. For Kitty was impulsive as a child where her compassions were concerned ; though a cool exercise of judgment was sure to prevail in the end.

People who go to warm climates more for the sake of enjoyment than anything else, are soon driven to the veriest trifles by way of pastime. Scenery, however beautiful, tires in time. Aspects of foreign life grow familiar ere long. Sight-seeing becomes a weariness to the spirit. So the little world of foreigners at Malaga gave its mind to amusement for the most part ; and drives, music, novels, dancing, charades, with other mild and irreproachable species of dissipation, filled the hours "from morn till noon, from noon till dewy eve."

On this occasion, something new in the way of recreation was proposed by Lady Gardiner, who could enjoy a *jeu d'esprit* better than any of her daughters, and was always exerting her motherly wiles to light up their melancholy greenish-yellowish leaf with a little sunshine. Lady Gardiner did her best to keep them youthful and to make herself look matronly, but time cannot be coaxed—even by a woman !

"Sit in a circle, all of you," said Lady Gardiner, when the convent had been explored, and the little party were resting under a group of palms, "and you shall have your fortunes told."

"Delightful!" cried Kitty. "I should dearly like to know what my fortune is to be. I always wished that I could read the stars when a child."

Sir George looked at her angrily for a moment, and then softening down, edged to her side, saying—

"Your fortune is sure to be good; but I am not so sure that I was born on a day of auspicious omen. What do you think?"

"You have certainly been most fortunate lately," Kitty said, with great gaiety, alluding to the twenty thousand pounds; "and very often one piece of happy fortune follows another."

"Who knows?" said Sir George, with emphasis.

"Who knows?" echoed Kitty, looking as innocent as a baby.

"Which of you will consult the oracle first?" asked Lady Gardiner, looking round. "Please bear in mind that I have been properly instructed in chiromancy by a Spanish gipsy, and that if I dole out evil fortune as well as good, it is not my fault."

"It sounds very awful," said Mr Tyrrell to Ella, shrugging his shoulders. "I will beg to be excused, Lady Gardiner, being extremely superstitious."

But Mr Tyrrell was of course compelled to share the common fate, and as Lady Gardiner predicted a great deal of good fortune with a very little bad fortune to every one, no one felt quite doomed. Great merriment ensued upon Sir George being told that he could not do better than follow out his own inclination in a certain matter that lay next his heart—concerning a lady!

Lady Gardiner meant to infer by this, that if Sir George proposed to her daughter, Madeleine, whom he certainly liked, he would be willingly received as her son-in-law. Ella could not control a genuine laugh at her father's expense; not dreaming for a moment that he ever appeared in a marriageable light to anybody—even to the mother of four elderly young ladies! Kitty teased Sir George with the utmost coolness about the prognostics that he seemed to take in such good part; and a certain Mrs Macgregor, a young widow who loved

titles as much as Kitty herself, treated the baronet as if he had grown fifteen years younger, and almost handsome, within the space of a few minutes.

The short bright day was drawing to a close as the little party drove homeward, catching glimpses of mountain ranges transformed by the setting sun into miracles of purple and golden glory. Kitty sat by Ella's side, opposite to Sir George and Mr Tyrrell, but wholly unable to enter into the spirit of the latter's enthusiasm. Whilst Mr Tyrrell and Ella talked of palms and sunsets with the eager enjoyment of people who have lived with Nature, and loved her well, Kitty said to herself, feeling half envious, half contemptuous, "Thus could I have enjoyed, and thought, and talked about beautiful things, if the Fates had been more generous, and not compelled me to build up my fortunes unaided and alone."

Sir George said very little during the drive; but when it came to an end, he asked Kitty whether she would not walk as far as the Consulate with him, and she said she should very much like a little walk at so bewitching an hour of the day.

So they set off, side by side.

"You don't object to a cigar, do you?" asked Sir George, after a considerable silence.

And of course Kitty did not object.

"Will you like to take my arm?" again asked her companion. "You must be a little tired."

And of course Kitty accepted his arm, saying that she was a little tired; adding, that after the long drive, the exercise was most refreshing.

"Don't you think we have had a pleasant day?" Sir George went on.

"Delightful, indeed."

"Though I daresay you were quite affronted, because that ass of a Frenchman chose to stay away!"

"Why should I be affronted?" Kitty said, with a smile.

"If you have really come to the conclusion that the adoration of a fellow like Fontanié is worth exactly thus much," Sir George went on, scattering a thimbleful of cigar-ashes to the

winds, "you show more sense than I ever gave a woman credit for."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Kitty, saucily, and stepping out, dropped a bewitching little curtsey.

"But, seriously speaking, if Ella's consent can be obtained, why should you not marry me?"

Kitty was silent.

"You wouldn't object, would you?" asked the baronet, sharply. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know; and a penniless girl, no matter how handsome, can't marry a title and a comfortable home every day."

"I know you do me great honour," Miss Kitty said, slowly—"very great honour indeed. But"—

"Of course there must be a few 'Buts!' I quite expected that."

"I was only going to say that nothing would induce me to marry you merely because you have a title," Kitty went on, with something of offended dignity in her voice. "I am not quite so mercenary as you seem to suppose."

"Oh! I take it for granted that you like me pretty well," answered her lover, coolly. "We have been such capital friends all along, and I'm sure, if ever a man was desperately in love, it is myself! But what about Ella?"

"Dear Ella! she must not be made unhappy, of all others in the world!"

"No, I must sooner give you up than spoil Ella's peace of mind. It would be morally impossible for me to grieve her."

"And I love her so dearly that I would almost give up my life for her sake."

"I know you would," Sir George said, eagerly, "and she knows it too. Surely she would make a little sacrifice in order to have you always with her."

Kitty, who knew Ella better than her father did, simply because they were both women, was silent.

"Suppose you name it to her?" Sir George added, with considerable uneasiness in his voice. "On my soul, I don't think I could!" And Kitty promised to name it to Ella.

## CHAPTER L.

*THE SWEETS OF LOVE.*

BEFORE Sir George and Kitty parted, they agreed that it would be best to keep their own counsel for a day or two. Sir George had long promised to visit an old military friend of his quartered at Gibraltar, and the bright thought struck him that he might just as well be out of the way whilst the two girls settled his love affair between them ! Such a thought would have hardly entered the head of an ordinary lover ; but then Sir George was not an ordinary lover. He considered himself to be desperately in love with his daughter's attractive protégée, and felt much elated at the idea of winning so young, devoted, and charming a wife, especially as he was now in a position to marry without injuring Ella's prospects. He did not "compass her with sweet observances," after Dr Norman's fashion, or woo her as only a born poet, like poor Perry, could. If Kitty felt satisfied, what did it matter ? Certainly, to come down from the affection of such men as Dr Norman and Perry to the affection of such men as Sir George, was coming down from figs to thistles, and from grapes to thorns, with a vengeance. Kitty, whatever might be her weaknesses, had the keenest perception of the reality of things, and whilst accepting Sir George's love, valued it exactly for what it was worth. She, moreover, looked into the future, and saw what it would be worth during the years to come.

In the first place, it would bring her a title, and Kitty exulted childishly over the idea of being called Lady Bartelotte. She repeated the name to herself again and again, and wrote it on little scraps of paper—

LADY BARTELOTTE,

and dreamed pleasantly at night of being called "My lady" by Francine and the rest of the servants. Thus much would Sir George's love bring her. And it would bring her, if not wealth—for Sir George was the last person in the world to woo his Danaë in a shower of gold—the appliances of wealth : a train

of servants, a well-appointed house to live in—*home* hardly seemed the word to use—a carriage to ride in, fashionable clothes to wear, perhaps even a few jewels.

All these things she had hitherto prized beyond the most precious gifts of affection; and was she going to undervalue them now when they were offered her for the term of her life?

By no means.

If all went well—that is to say, if Ella could be brought to consent—she should marry Sir George, and make him as good a wife as his heart could desire. She should turn her back upon those sweet foolish fictions of youth, and love, and romance, and try to forget that for her they had ever been. She should take Sir George's gifts in a kindly and not a captious spirit; not asking for more than he had to give, not making herself or her husband miserable, because she could not love him as she knew it was in her nature to love!

During the two or three days that intervened between Sir George's proposal of marriage and his departure for Gibraltar, his behaviour was hardly what could be called dignified. In Ella's presence he conducted himself with so much discretion towards the woman he adored, that no one would have guessed his secret sentiments for an instant. He affected a sort of patronising air to her, which to any one less amiable and long-suffering than Kitty, would have been intolerable; asked her to run and fetch this, to sit down by his side and write that; corrected her faults of pronunciation, flatly quizzed her for such naïve little blunders in etiquette as the most careful and clever persons can hardly help making who have upheaved themselves from the proletarian to the patrician strata of society; in fine, whilst intending to blind Ella, and to put his relationship with Kitty on a sure and stable footing by a little wholesome discipline, made himself appear as unlike a lover as well could be.

Now, full credit must be given to Sir George for wooing Kitty in this frank and unceremonious manner. He had not forgotten Mrs Cornford and her bottle of Hollands, and felt that, however much he might admire and adore Kitty, it was an act of extraordinary condescension on his part to make her Lady Bartelotte, and that if he began by spoiling her at the

outset, there would be no telling what airs she might not take upon herself in the future. She must understand the sacrifice he was making for her sake. These splendid creatures, Sir George mused, who turn a man's brain, have often very strong wills of their own ; and if Miss Kitty has a very strong will of her own, which she chooses to keep in the background for the present—well, we shall see who is to be the master !

Sir George was simply endeavouring, therefore, to curb Kitty's ambition, hoping by this means to prevent all misunderstanding in the future. Kitty had much better marry him with her eyes open if she married him at all ; and though he felt that to lose her now would disappoint him and enrage him beyond measure, he was determined to make courtship a fit preparation for marriage. When alone with her he would permit himself to indulge in tender little looks and speeches that, he thought, must more than compensate for overt castigations and hostilities. He would talk to her in a confidential way about her future manner of living, interlarding his words with "my love," and "my dear," as if they were married already. Once or twice he had attempted to behave in a more lover-like fashion, but Miss Kitty, who was as proud as a peacock where her personal dignity was concerned, had repelled these advances with a charming show of haughtiness, saying—

" You forget, Sir George, that we are not engaged as yet ; and though I am the beggar's daughter, and you are King Cophetua, I presume that the beggar's daughter is not to be thought worse of for having a little womanly pride, sir ? "

And this little touch of coquetry, prudery—call it what you will—made the baronet swear a hundred secret vows that a girl with so much spirit should be his wife at any cost.

In all other respects Kitty was as meek as if indeed she were the beggar's daughter, and Sir George, King Cophetua. She treated him exactly in the way that some men like to be treated by women, referring to his judgment in everything, anticipating his wishes, hanging upon his looks, paying the homage of a willing slave. What wonder that poor Sir George was intoxicated ! He was continually checking himself in his generous impulses, however, thinking : " I must not—I will

not be befooled by her, charming as she is ; or there will be no peace for us in the future."

For instance, they were talking, one day, about their probable return to England, and Sir George, who had been extremely fault-finding and captious that morning, mentioned a season in London by way of a compensating sugar-plum.

Kitty's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with pleasure at the bare thought. For a few seconds she could not speak.

#### A season in London !

As if in a vision, all the delights of such an old, old dream fulfilled passed before her mind. She saw herself, the Cinderella of bygone times, driving through the parks in the full sunshine of a June afternoon ; her equipage flashing by, the dusty, eager foot-passengers looking on ; her toilet as elegant as those she was wont to envy when she also had gazed at the gay scene, dusty and on foot ; she saw herself, leaning on her husband's arm—he a baronet !—ascending carpeted staircases, and joining crowds of fashionable men and women in brilliantly-lighted reception-rooms ; she saw—what, indeed, did she not see during that momentary rapture ?

Sir George's voice broke the spell.

" You have too much good sense to care about conventionalities, I am sure," he said ; " and of course we could not do as other people do ; but we should see the picture-galleries, and Ella would hear a little good music."

He added, suddenly, " You don't care for gaieties, I hope ? "

Upon which Kitty blushed guiltily, and said she did not care much for them.

" Because it is better we should understand each other upon that point without delay," her lover went on. " We could not pretend to fashionable gaieties in any shape, and Ella does not like them ; we should be able to stay at Clarges Street, or at Akenholme Park, and be very comfortable with a little economy ; but there would be no sort of surplus for conventional extravagances. I must think of the future, and provide for you as well as Ella, in case"— he broke off hesitatingly,— " in case it should be necessary. You will have as comfortable a home as any lady could desire, and you know that I will leave no

stone unturned to make you happy. But there is a medium in all things, and if comforts will not satisfy a woman, no amount of luxuries ever will."

"I want no luxuries. You are much too good for me," poor Kitty said, humbly, feeling ready to cry, less overcome by Sir George's goodness than by a feeling of childish disappointment.

"Nonsense!" he said. And not daring to kiss her yet, though sorely tempted to do so, he clasped her hand, and spoke out boldly like a lover, "I will be as good to you as my means will allow when you are my wife. You are a little fond of me, are you not?"

Of course Kitty was fond of him. Was she not naturally disposed to be fond of those who loved her, and gave her the things in which her soul delighted? He was unlike her former lovers. He had neither Perry's beautiful genius, nor Regy's boyish enthusiasm, nor Dr Norman's quiet dignity; and his love for her was not as the love of these had been. But he was rich, whilst they were poor, and—wanting alike the sweet gifts and graces of youth, and the more solid qualities of a manhood rife in goodness and wisdom—could win her, because he possessed wealth, and titles, and ancestral lands.

Kitty was far from forgetting the past under these new influences. Sometimes she would drop the book she was reading, and dream a dream. She had heard many an old Greek fairy-tale in her girlhood, had seen many a nymph and god portrayed on canvas or sculptured in marble; and now, in her days of worldly care, and thoughts of other things, these beautiful fancies came back to her, fresher, fairer, more real than ever.

She pictured Perry and herself, both young, both beautiful, and both loving, wandering hand in hand about some enchanted island, where the sunshine, and the youth, and the contentment lasted for ever and ever.

And then Sir George's voice would suddenly break the spell, and the dream of youth, and love, and immortality vanished, as it had come. "It must be all for the best," Kitty consoled herself by saying again and again. "I meant to do Perry no harm; I meant to do no one any harm; but I could not, I dared not enter upon a life that was hateful to me. No amount of

self-sacrifice on my part could have enabled me to be happy enough to make others happy under those circumstances."

Poor Kitty's moral notions were, it must be confessed, sadly hazy. She could not see what good women—indeed, most women—perceive by intuition, that where self-sacrifice is a positive duty, one is generally as happy as one could be under any other circumstances, and often more so.

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## CHAPTER LI.

### *THE BITTERNESS OF FRIENDSHIP.*

SIR GEORGE set off to Gibraltar in high glee.

"Mind and do your best for us both—your very best," were his last words to Kitty, before stepping on board the little steamer that was to carry him away from the field of battle. "Had I been able to do any good, I would have stayed; but I'm much better out of the way."

Kitty smiled to herself as she walked home in the blazing noon tide. What a parody upon love-making was this! and yet it was the only love-making to which she had ever willingly listened! Had she possessed the faculty of humour in equal degree with other faculties, she would have seen, not only the strangeness of Sir George's conduct, but the glaring whimsicality of it. She wished that he were different in many things, but she did not see that his conduct towards herself was as undignified as it was comical.

"After all, it is better he should be away," she mused. "It would be intolerable to me to see a quarrel arise between Ella and her father on my account. I will banish myself, a beggar, to the uttermost ends of the earth rather than make them so miserable."

But the idea of being banished, a beggar, to remote places of the earth, was not a cheerful subject of contemplation to Kitty; whilst that of being Lady Bartelotte, and the mistress of Akenholme Park, was eminently so. She therefore set aside the prospect of martyrdom, fully determined to act the martyr if occasion required, mind you! and indulged in pleasant dreams of future splendour. All splendour is comparative, and

to the Cinderella of Paradise Place, the most threadbare, out-at-elbow aristocracy imaginable seemed priceless, and not at all to be compared to the loving, merry poverty of Bohemia.

Whilst sauntering on with the man-servant at her heels—for English ladies do not walk unattended in Spain—she was overtaken by the Baron de Fontanié.

"I am going up to Sir George's to pay my respects," he said. "May I walk with you?"

"Certainly," Kitty answered, smiling, "though Sir George is not at home."

"I have to leave Malaga for Paris by this evening's train," he went on, without heeding the last part of her speech, "and I wanted to thank you all for your hospitality to me."

"I am sorry that you have to leave Malaga," Kitty said, quite naturally.

"Pray don't be sorry. I am very glad."

Kitty coloured, and was silent. The baron had always been so amiable, so courteous, so full of consideration for every one's feelings, especially in small matters, that she could only attribute this sudden savageness of manner to a fit of extreme ill-temper.

"I suppose it happens to everybody to find the accumulated experience of life so unexpectedly hurled at him like Jupiter's thunderbolt sometimes," said the baron ; then turning to her quickly, he asked—

"Has it happened also to Mademoiselle Silver ?"

Kitty smiled.

"Not yet," she answered, in her frank, innocent way.

"Ah ! you are so much younger than I—not much above half my years : and yet you are a woman, and women live quickly."

"Not all women ; and I have lived very little in the world, which makes a difference."

The baron seemed a little disconcerted at Kitty's manner, which was perfectly unembarrassed, easy, and free from sentiment. The fact is, her tact was for once wholly at fault, and she no more knew what was going on in her companion's mind, than he knew what dreams had just before been making her eyes brighter, and her cheeks rosier than usual.

"I will tell you—that is to say, if you care to hear—what has been the accumulated experience of my life on two subjects, or rather, on one subject," the baron went on after a pause. Kitty not replying, he repeated—

"Do you care to hear?"

"Certainly," Miss Kitty said, beginning to blush a little.

"My experience, then, Miss Silver, is that friendship is impossible between a man and woman, who have no stronger feeling for any third person. Am I not worldly-wise, and trained not in one, but a dozen schools of society? Am I not double your years? Am I not a cosmopolitan? Am I not a politician and a diplomatist? But I am a man, and you are a woman! Our friendship was a thing that could not last. *Voilà tout!*"

Kitty had crimsoned to the eyebrows at the beginning of this speech, but was now slowly recovering self-possession.

Was he, too, her lover? He, the elegant, the courtly, the brilliant Baron de Fontanié?

She felt as one in a dream. A hundred fancies, a hundred ambitions, passed across her mind. The hurried leave-taking on the quay, and the secret courtship of the last day or two, seemed as far off as if they had taken place years ago.

"We may meet again, or we may not; but how should that do us either good or harm? I cannot be your lover—I dare not be your friend. The rest doesn't matter—at least to me," he added, "and I have no right to ask whether it matters to you. But pray believe that this friendship of ours seemed the sweetest thing in my life once: and if it has since turned out to be the most bitter, you are wholly free from blame."

They walked on, side by side, in uneasy silence. There appeared no need to say any more; and yet each was waiting for the sound of the other's voice.

When Sir George's villa was within a hundred yards of them, the baron said, very quickly and eagerly—

"If I can at any time serve you, or friends of yours, I entreat you to count on me. It will always give me pleasure to be reminded of the first epoch in our acquaintance, and if I cannot forget the last," he shrugged his shoulders, and added, "what does it matter?"

"Thank you very much," Kitty said. "I may at some future time be very glad to remember your kind promise."

She said this thinking of poor Perry, and wondering whether the baron would not buy pictures of him some day.

"Will you, too, remember the first pleasant days we spent together at Malaga?" he asked.

"Oh! what does it matter?" she answered, echoing his words somewhat bitterly; and then he opened the gate for her, and not a word more was said till they joined Ella.

As soon as she could get away, Kitty stole into a quiet garden-nook, and thought over the events of the last hour. At first there was a smile on her lips and an elation in her whole aspect; but, by and by, the smile faded, and her look became first subdued, and by little and little, almost stern.

She felt very angry with the baron, and did not seek to excuse herself for the feeling. He had undoubtedly done what was upright, and dignified, and manly: but his way of doing it affronted her. It was the man's way of doing a thing, she said to herself—cold, straightforward, unflinching. The woman's way seemed best to her, just a little shilly-shallying, a little sentimental, a little kind. Had the tables been turned, and the verdict of farewell come from her own lips instead of his, how differently it would have been worded! When she was forced to tell painful truths to Dr Norman and Perry, had she not sweetened them with tenderness, as children's physic is sweetened with sugar? The baron administered his physic without caring how it tasted to her palate, and she owned that it was very bitter. Truth to tell, our poor Kitty saw such a future of commonplaces stretching before her, that she would fain have enjoyed a little romance ere it should have become forbidden fruit for ever.

And her vanity was somewhat hurt. Having said thus much, it surely behoved the baron to say a little more. If he could not be her lover, and dared not be her friend, he should at least have taken the trouble to find out in which light he was most acceptable. His conduct augured—at least to a mind like Kitty's, always too ready to gloss over the unpleasant side of things with plausibilities—hardness as well as coldness. Did

he think that she cared for him, or did he not? In the first place it was his duty to be kind ; in the second, to have kept his counsel. As it was he had spoken out, relieving his own mind, but undoubtedly disturbing the peace of her own.

She grew very angry as she pondered over the matter. It would have been such a triumph to let Sir George find the baron at her feet on his return! Of course, she should have behaved in a firm and proper manner, cleaving to the old love, and not putting off with the new; for Miss Kitty always persuaded herself that she had done the right thing in the past, and would do the right thing in the future; but such a lesson must have been most salutary to her too confident and easy lover. Sir George knew right well how dearly she loved and prized his title; had not the baron a title, and decorations of half the Courts of Europe besides?

But he had gone, and she determined to drive the mortification of his going from her mind, and give it up to realities only.

They were not all pleasant.

She knew well enough that she could shield herself from Ella's anger; but she felt sure that Ella would be vexed at the onset. What daughter ever approved of her father's marriage? What only daughter ever willingly made way for a step-mother? True, Kitty was determined to be all humility where her rights, as mistress of Sir George's house, were concerned. True, she was firmly resolved to go on as she had begun, sacrificing everything to Ella's slightest wish. But perhaps Ella would object to accept such sacrifices under their new relationship. Ella was the most unselfish being Kitty had ever known; yet she doubted the issue of the forthcoming ordeal.

If Ella welcomed the change that would fix her friend irreversibly by her side, all would be well. The wedding clothes need not occupy much time; the wedding could as easily take place at Malaga as anywhere else; she might become Lady Bartelotte in a few months—why not in a few weeks?

That thought was a salve to her wounded spirit. Whatever happened, she was to be Lady Bartelotte, and when that happy consummation arrived, she should taste of peace, and rest, and the contentment that knows no ambition. There would no

longer be any need for her to scheme, and ponder, and weave in loneliness the webs of Fate.

At least, so she assured herself, and, putting on a blithe aspect, went straight to Ella, first to tell her of the baron's strange confession, and the next of her father's offer of marriage. Surely a stranger errand than the last had never been entrusted to any woman!

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## CHAPTER LII.

ELLA heard the first story complacently enough. She was angry with the baron for having ruffled her friend's feelings, and quite agreed with Kitty that in love-making, half measures were inadmissible ; and that a man who was not permitted by circumstances to make a proposal of marriage, was certainly not permitted by etiquette to make a declaration of love. But she could not conceal a certain amount of self-congratulation that all imminent danger of losing her darling was over.

"I do wish you to marry one day," she said, apologetically. "I am not selfish enough to hope for a moment that of all your lovers none shall win you and make you happy. But there is time enough yet, and we are very happy as we are."

"Very happy," Kitty said, and sighed.

Ella looked up anxiously.

"What else has happened ?" she asked, laying one little hand on her friend's arm.

"O Ella ! you would never guess."

"You are not unhappy ? You did not love that man, dearest ?" Ella cried, brimful of affectionate concern.

Kitty shook her head.

"You have not made up your mind that you care for Mr Perugino, after all"—

"No—oh, no !"

"The traitorous Tyrrell has not made you an offer ?" said Ella, blushing as she spoke, for she and Mr Tyrrell had ever been the best of friends.

Again Kitty shook her head ; and at last, being urgently pressed by her friend to confide her secret, she said, with almost a childish expression of dismay—

“ Sir George wants me to marry him—if you don’t mind.”

This piece of information at first affected Ella in a wholly unexpected way. We have heard of earthquakes and other sudden convulsions of nature, or shocks of any kind acting magnetically upon chronic diseases, whether mental or physical ; and such was the effect of Kitty’s disclosure upon Ella.

She forgot that since her last severe attack of illness at Arcachon she had never risen from her couch unassisted ; she forgot that even moderate laughter was almost sure to bring on a fit of coughing ; she forgot everything in comic amazement, jumping from her seat, walking up and down the room laughing the loud enjoying laugh of a robust person.

“ Oh, that is delicious ! ” she cried ; and, when her first ebullition of amusement was over, she sat down by Kitty’s side and begged to be told all about it.

“ But you will be tired. Do let me make you comfortable on the sofa,” Kitty urged. Ella, however, persisted in remaining where she was.

“ I am too impatient,” she said, “ and I do believe that papa’s proposals to you have cured all my aches and pains for months to come. But we must soon put these romantic ideas out of his head, my dear.”

Kitty looked a little shocked at Ella’s levity.

“ It is no laughing matter, I assure you,” she said, with great seriousness. “ I suppose it is difficult for you to look upon Sir George in the same light as other people do. But he is no older than Dr Norman, and you saw no absurdity in Dr Norman’s attachment for me.”

“ That is quite another thing,” Ella answered, gravely comic. “ Dr Norman is not my father.”

“ But the circumstances were in a measure similar. Dr Norman’s eldest son was as old as you are,” Kitty continued, “ and people fall in love irrespective of circumstances.”

“ You have not fallen in love with papa, have you ? ” Ella asked, with another outburst of genuine laughter. “ My dear,

I adore you, but I couldn't endure a stepmother—I couldn't indeed."

"Do be serious for five minutes," Kitty said, still as grave as a judge.

"I can't be serious where papa's love-affairs are concerned. How can I?" asked Ella. "He is quite unlike other people, and I know him so well,—dear, good, fidgety papa! What glamour have you cast over his eyes to work this mischief?"

"O Ella! as if I ever dreamed that such a thing was going to happen."

"Dear Kitty, I only spoke in jest. It is so much better that we treat the matter as a joke. It is, indeed."

"Sir George would never forgive me if I so treated it," Kitty answered.

Seeing that there was no prospect of coming to any conclusion whilst she persisted in her sportive mood, Ella returned to her sofa, and declared herself penitent, and willing to be good and tractable for the term of Kitty's good pleasure.

"Nothing could have happened so embarrassing," Kitty began, "and you will readily believe me when I say, so unexpected. You have seen all along how frank and friendly has been the intercourse between Sir George and myself, and how little I dreamed that it would ever change. But the mischief is done past cure"—

"We won't say so," Ella interposed, cheerfully, "Papa loves me too dearly, and has too much friendship for yourself, to be incapable of making a sacrifice for us. He must see things in the proper light ere very long."

Kitty shook her head.

"Indeed, Ella dear, I speak without exaggeration when I say that the mischief is done past cure." Then she added, with emphasis, "I am sure that Sir George's liking for me is no passing fancy. I am sure that I shall not be able to stay under your roof, unless as Sir George's wife. Would that, for your sake, this were not the truth."

"O Kitty! it cannot, cannot be the truth! I will not, I dare not believe it. We are both in a nightmare, from which we shall wake soon."

Again Kitty shook her head, and this time there was even more of stately sadness and resolution in the gesture than before. Can a mind like Kitty's be swayed by the paltry consideration of rank? Would she sacrifice her freedom, her youth, her beauty, for the scant privileges of being Sir George Bartelotte's wife? Would she consent to give up so much in return for so little? These were the thoughts that now passed across Ella's mind.

"Putting myself wholly out of the question, would you marry papa?" she asked at length, turning suddenly cold and pale.

"My darling, it is impossible to put you out of the question. If I marry Sir George, I ensure myself the happiness of spending my life with you. If I do not marry him—into such straits has this madness of his brought us—I could not with comfort, with dignity, nay, with decorum, remain in his house."

And then she crossed over, and, kneeling by Ella's side, kissed her pale cheeks and her cold lips. For a time, Ella lay wholly silent, sighing gently, and making no sort of response to Kitty's caresses and tender words. By and by, she asked—

"Did papa know that I was to be told this miserable secret during his absence?"

"Sir George had no courage to tell you himself, and deputed me to do it," Kitty said, blushing a little—as was surely natural—for her lover.

"You could not marry papa?" Ella cried, more impetuously than ever. "It would not be good; it would not be right. A woman should love her husband, at least a little."

"It was my dream, once, to marry a husband whom I should love a great deal; but I suppose all women have those dreams when they are very young," Kitty made answer, sadly. "How seldom do they come true!"

"To me it seems," Ella said, "that nothing could be more calculated to make you wretched. You know as well as I do what papa's failings are. Could you bear to be tied to him, to be dependent on him, all your life?"

"One cannot have a perfect life, Ella. I would make any sacrifice to have you with me always."

"What if you should find the sacrifice greater than you could bear? If papa should grow hateful to you? O Kitty! next to him, you are the dearest thing I have in the world, and I would rather die than lose you so."

And saying this, Ella cried bitterly, and would not be consoled, though Kitty said a hundred loving things, made a hundred loving protestations. Was not Ella her darling, her more than friend, as her very sister? Were they not unhappy when apart, contented if together? Would not she, Kitty, find any sacrifice light that knit them with a closer tie? Then, finding her passionate pleadings of no use, she reasoned calmly—

"If," she said, "my vanity is touched at the prospect of marrying a man of title and fortune, do you not see that it is just my affection for you prevents such a marriage from being worldly, mercenary—call it what you will? I am sure you do not dream, for a moment, that I would marry Sir George if I did not respect and like him sincerely, and if I did not love you beyond all my friends."

"Oh! no," Ella said, still crying.

"You must know from my past history," Kitty went on, "that I am the last person in all the world to take upon myself duties that I could not fulfil. Why did I refuse poor Perry—Mr Neeve? Why did I refuse Dr Norman? Why did I forsake Myra? Simply because they wanted more of me than I could give."

"And they were all more fitted to make you happy than papa! O Kitty, I am his daughter, and, though I love him as a daughter should, I warn you solemnly against this marriage. You will not be able to bear the burden you are laying upon your own shoulders."

"For your sake I shall," Kitty said, softly.

"My darling!" Ella continued, in the same passionate strain—"my darling! let this unhappy business divide us now rather than put bitterness in our hearts by and by. Oh, think of what it would be if we ever grew to hate each other!" and again Ella sobbed as if her heart would break.

Kitty pressed her hand, but said never a word.

"I know that you would try to make us both happy, and

that you would never think of yourself, or let us see what you suffered. But could I help seeing it—I who love you so entirely? And though you would be the victim, I could not help or comfort you. How could I side with you against my father?"

"I think there would be no victim in the case at all," Kitty said, smiling. "I should have you to love me, and I am sure Sir George would always be kind and good; moreover, you would remain the real mistress of your father's house—I never dreamed of usurping your place"—

"O Kitty! it is not that I am troubled about," Ella cried, with almost a moan of pain.

Kitty bent over her, caressing, tearful, bright.

"Let us not talk any more now, dear Ella. It will all come right in time. Sir George may overcome his fancy, or you may overcome your fears. But we will not break our hearts in advance."

And then she persuaded Ella to drive with her, to pay visits, to do a hundred and one pleasant and amusing things. As good fortune would have it, Mr Tyrrell brought up a friend of his that very evening—an artist, laden with a portfolio; and what with sketches, music, and talk, Ella's spirits somewhat revived.

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## CHAPTER LIII.

### *THE LULL AFTER THE STORM.*

AFTER the storm came a lull.

Seeing Ella so implacably unhappy, Kitty could not do otherwise than let the question of a marriage between herself and Sir George rest for the present. She had tried argument, she had tried entreaty, she had tried coaxing—all failed; and Kitty, who combined the wisdom of the serpent with the gentleness of the dove, saw that it was not only kind, but expedient, to wait and bide her time.

Meantime, Sir George, having heard from Kitty how matters stood at home, waited a little longer at Gibraltar, and wrote to Ella, proposing a yacht voyage for her and Kitty. His host

was about to take his family to Tangiers, Algiers, Constantine, and other interesting places on the African coast, and invited Sir George to join them. Why should not the invitation be accepted ? It was always cheap to accept invitations, and generally pleasant. A yacht voyage had been recommended to Ella. A yacht voyage would bridge over the time that should intervene before their arrival in England. A yacht voyage would be sure to please Kitty, because everything pleased her. Ella was to write word by return of post whether she consented to the proposal or no ; and in the former case, they must be ready for starting at a day's notice.

"What would you like best to do ?" asked Ella of Kitty, after reading aloud her father's proposal.

"I think we had better go," Kitty said, without a moment's hesitation. "It will be amusing, and we all want amusement ;" adding, with a sigh, "we can never find Malaga such a happy place again."

"True," Ella answered. "I will write to papa by the next post, and say that we are ready."

"And I will pay our bills, and get our clothes packed," Kitty said, briskly. "I think that this yacht voyage is a veritable piece of good fortune, dear Ella, and that the soft winds of the Mediterranean will blow all our troubles away."

She said this sportively, and, stooping, kissed her friend on the brow. But Ella did not respond to the mood.

"Heaven grant that you may prove a true prophet, dear !" she said, and that was all.

Kitty talked of the new places they were to see, of the benefit Ella was sure to derive from the trip, of their return to England afterwards, of Akenholme Park, and the improvements Ella was to effect there ; of everything, indeed, that was pleasant under the sun.

"I know exactly how your room is to be fitted up at Akenholme," she said. "The walls shall be painted by hand—roses on a delicate grey ground picked out with gold, rose-coloured curtains, grey and rose carpet ; your little water-colour sketches, Mr Tyrrell's gifts, framed and hung on silver rods ; and a white and gold flower-stand in each window."

"I shall not have money enough for such elegances as those," Ella said, drearily; "and if you are not there, I dare say we shall have things much as they are."

"But I shall be there," Kitty said; adding, "for a time, at least. I must see your English home, even if I go away, never to cross the threshold again."

"Do not let us talk of those things," Ella said. "I cannot bear it."

And she gathered her friend to her heart, and sobbed like a child.

This was the only cloud that was permitted to pass over their horizon from the time of Kitty's disclosure to that of departure. Ella persistently refused alike consolation and confidence, and Kitty could not constrain her to either. It was a painful, embarrassed, dreary time to both, all the more that each felt she could have ended it had she willed.

Had Kitty said—

"Do you go for this little trip, and let me stay behind to be fetched by and by, when Sir George has overcome his fancy," all would have been well.

Had Ella said—

"Let it be as papa and you desire; I will make up my mind to be happy," all would have been well too.

Kitty, whose life for the last year or two had been made up of infinitesimal sacrifices, hesitated—nay, recoiled—from making a great sacrifice when called upon to do so. She knew, well enough, that Sir George's affection for Ella, and his satisfaction in her happiness, would have healed his wound in time; but she did not wish it to heal, and she would not move a finger on Ella's behalf. The conviction made her feel a little self-reproach.

Ella, on the other side, though possessing the most unselfish nature in the world, could not help being selfish now. It was just the one crisis of life that baffled alike her instincts and her convictions. If she let Kitty make herself happy—or rather, miserable—after her own fashion, on whom would the retribution fall heaviest? If she, with apparent amiability and self-immolation, helped on the marriage which was so hateful to her, could she maintain the amiability?—could she act the self-immolation up to the end?

She felt that she could not. She felt that, much as she loved Kitty, she should feel differently towards her, and that without any volition of her own, from the moment she became her father's wife. Kitty, she knew well enough, would never let her suffer vexations. Whilst measuring to the full her friend's capability of endurance, Ella shrank from putting it to such a test. Far more than she doubted Kitty's powers of self-sacrifice, did she dread the limits of her own. Could she submit to become second in her father's house? Could Kitty's affection bear to be translated into such a relationship? Could either of the family trio proposed by Kitty be happy without practising deception towards the others?

Ella was of too noble a nature to doubt the integrity of her friend's purpose. That Kitty's better judgment was for once wholly at fault—that her fancy had been captivated by the prospect of such an alliance—that just a little vanity leavened the abundance of affection for herself—actuated her in this persistence, Ella readily admitted. More she would not admit.

Kitty might be ambitious; she might have a touch of worldliness in her disposition; she might unfairly appraise the little she would gain by this marriage, and the all she would lose; but she was loyal, and would be loyal to the end.

Poor Ella prepared for the yacht voyage with a heavy heart; though, after the first embarrassment of meeting Sir George was over, matters mended a little. Sir George welcomed her with more than ordinary tenderness, and Ella felt quite touched by his contrite, self-condemning look. Only half a dozen words passed between them on the one subject lying next their hearts.

"Kitty has told you what passed between us before I left," he said, very humbly.

"Yes," she answered, controlling her agitation by a great effort; "and we agreed that it would be better to let things rest as they are for a time."

"Of course, of course," he said, kissing her. "Whatever we do, we won't make you unhappy, darling."

Then matters mended a little; and the cheerful adieux were made to friends ashore, and the pretty yacht "curtsied to the

land," as a poet has said, and away they glided over the bright blue Mediterranean in search of sunshine. Mr Tyrrell had contrived to be one of the invited, and his company added to the hundred and one distractions of Ella's new life. She had never made this sort of sea-trip before. Everything interested her, from the simplest facts of nautical science to the waifs and strays of natural history she picked up by the way. All on board felt naturally interested in one so young, so winning, and so submissive under the burden of constant ill-health and deprivation ; so Ella was too much petted, and too well amused, to feel her trouble ever present with her.

Kitty behaved with the utmost discretion and tenderness. No one would have imagined for a moment that anything beyond the merest friendly feeling existed between herself and Sir George ; and yet, in the short tête-à-tête that occurred now and then, she consoled, pacified, reassured him. Sir George knew well enough the state of Ella's feelings, but throughout this, to him, too protracted interregnum, he never doubted that the issue of events would be contrary to his wishes.

If Kitty reassured Sir George, she equally reassured Ella ; not by saying—This marriage shall for your sake be given up—but by a tacit acquiescence in delay. Ella was not to be made unhappy ; Ella was not to become the victim ; Ella was to settle the fateful question for them all by and by.

So great, almost passionate, was Kitty's tenderness to her friend in those days, that Ella felt as if the sacrifice required of her was one she ought to make. Who loved her in all the world as Kitty had done ? Who cared for her so well ? Ella reproached herself every day.

Thus, by a little wary temporising, and a good deal of reticence and sweet temper on Kitty's side, two months passed in at least outward tranquillity, and in something very nearly like inward peace. Kitty dreamed on ; Ella never ceased to dread ; Sir George hugged his pet ambition none the less ; but all said to their secret hearts—It will be well ; and went on hoping against hope.

And the pretty little *Undine* glided from port to port, and many cheerful adventures and beautiful sights they saw as

they sailed along in that sweet, southern spring-tide, and none more beautiful than that of Algiers, the city of marble palaces flashing across the purple sea. But there was fever in the place, and thus it happened that when poor Perry came hither, burning with the desire to see Kitty once more, he found her gone, without a trace.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### *DR NORMAN SEEKS CONSOLATION.*

WHILST Kitty was guiding her little craft so warily across the seas of life, whilst Perry was rushing madly hither and thither in search of distraction, whilst Myra was forgetting the bitterness of friendship in the amusements of a wedding trip to Paris, whilst Laura's little heart was pining away for news of Perry, what was Dr Norman doing? Dr Norman confessed to himself that disappointment and misfortune had roused him at last from a state of culpable self-indulgence, and that, so far, they were both good. He did not cease to grieve passionately for the loss of Kitty, and, above all, for the loss of faith in her; he did not cease to regret the wreck of his worldly prosperity; but these troubles, having quickened his faculties and stirred up his moral convictions, were wholesome. He reviewed the last few years of his life with pain and shame. During that sad and solitary period, what effort had he made on behalf of his children, of society, of the world? A supreme grief had fallen upon him, in the flower of his age, to which he had succumbed without a struggle. Full of manly contrition and self-reproach, he now set to work to build up his broken fortunes, and make of his life something nobler, better, more fruitful than it once promised to be.

A particular series of scientific investigations had desultorily occupied his time for many years; and lately, by dint of happy induction and indefatigable research, he had arrived at what was certainly a valuable hypothesis, and promised to develop into a discovery for all time.

With the inexhaustible patience of the lover of truth, he now went on his way, if not as confident as Columbus, at least as

hopeful. Having methodically arranged the result of his experiments in a set of papers, he laid them before the most eminent men of science he knew, and received ample encouragement, both to continue his researches, and to popularise those that were sufficiently advanced.

So, to Prissy's intense delight, Dr Norman, who was already a fellow of several of the learned societies, promised to deliver a series of lectures at the Royal Institution. Of course, Prissy was much too young to have any idea of the real nature of her father's studies and speculations ; but she was quite old enough to understand the meaning of fame, and to be ambitious on his behalf. The little maiden jumped at conclusions quickly. At the luncheon-table she heard Dr Norman's friends drop such phrases as these—

“They will be making you fellow of half the scientific societies of Europe, after this, Norman !”

Or—“It is really incumbent upon you to make known such valuable speculations to the world.”

Or—“I always said you would get tired of hiding your head under a bushel.”

And she stored them up in her mind, and dreamed that her papa was a second Sir Isaac Newton, who, from the falling of the apple, discovered the centre of gravity ; and that the next thing to happen was his summons to the Court of the Sovereign, and all sorts of consequent honours and emoluments.

She cut out, from scientific and other journals, every scrap of paper bearing her father's name, and pasted them in an album, which ever after took the place of her once-beloved dolls.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Laura,” she would say. “You don't care a bit what papa does, any more than if he were the missionary at Timbuctoo, who was eaten up, and his hat and hymn-book too.”

“O Prissy ! how can you say such unkind things ?” gentle Laura made answer, her eyes filling.

“But it's the truth. Isn't it the truth ?” Prissy would urge ; and Laura felt she could not honestly say no. She loved her father, but her whole heart and soul were with Perry, Mrs Cornford, Vittoria, and those other dear enthusiasts.

astic friends who had made her life so passing sweet for a little space.

This new atmosphere of thoughtful activity and realism as little suited Laura's dreamy nature as the brisk air of mountain tops suits some poor invalid. She would fain have interested herself, as Prissy did, in making experiments with vinegar and a lump of chalk, or in collecting and classifying fossils, or in finding out the component parts of a carrot at the South Kensington Museum ; she would fain have understood, when a kindly Norwegian professor gave her and Prissy a little lecture about the lake-dwellers of Switzerland ; and have showed some interest in the numerous topics so vigorously discussed at her father's dinner-table ; but she could not force herself to do so. For her the dry bones would never live, and it made her very unhappy to spend her days thus unsympathised with and unsympathising. The worst of it was, that she felt separated for ever from that seductive life of freedom, art, and friendship. As much sternness as it was in Dr Norman's nature to show to any child of his, he had shown towards Laura when she so obstinately opposed his wishes in Paris. From that time to this the name of Mrs Cornford was avoided on both sides ; and it seemed to be a tacit understanding that all intercourse with Paradise Place was over. Dr Norman did not say—'Stay away.' Laura did not ask—' May I go ? ' But weeks and months wore on, and she lacked courage to moot the question.

All concerning them had become mysterious to her. Whether Mrs Cornford was indeed home again ; whether Perry had ever returned from his wanderings ; whether she was remembered by him, or purposely banished from recollection, she could not guess. Not a sign came from the old familiar circle of which she had once been a cherished member ; and she shivered like the outcast who beholds some happy hearth from the desolation of the streets.

Perhaps most men in such a case would have been less blind than Dr Norman regarding his little daughter, and would have seen that she was unhappy. But where sympathy does not exist between them, who so slow to comprehend each other as

those of the same blood, who eat at the same board from day to day? Dr Norman could not see what right Laura had to be unhappy, and certainly did all in his power to make her life bright and good; he did not understand his child; that was all. - Had a transient cloud passed over Prissy's little soul, no mental vision would have been quicker to perceive it than her father's. And yet neither Dr Norman, nor Prissy, nor Laura herself, were to blame for her isolation. These things of daily life, that look so simple, are often sad and complicated beyond human understanding.

Laura and Prissy, on half-holidays, accompanied by the boys, used to take long walks in the Parks and Kensington Gardens; but they never encountered any one from Paradise Place. The fancied resemblance of some passer-by to Perry would often make Laura's cheek flush and heart beat quickly, but the real Perry she never encountered.

One day it chanced that Laura and her little sister were walking along the High Street, when they heard a noisy scampering behind them, and a vociferated cry of—

“Hollo, Laura! it's only us!”

And forthwith Minnie and the little tag-rag and bob-tail set, rushed upon her, kissing her, clutching her by the arms, demonstrating their joy in a dozen unconventional ways.

“What larks!” cried Miss Binnie. “Don't you wish we were in Paris, though, Laura? I do. We've no one to take us to play now.”

“Aunty's so grumpy,” broke in Mimi, “we daren't say our souls are our own.”

“But we're out on the rampage to-day, and we've been shooting for prizes at an oyster shop. Such a jolly little target, and an oyster for every hit within the blue line,” added Tommie, and smacked her lips with great gusto. “Have you got sixpence? and will you come with us and have a try?”

“Oh, no! we can't stay,” Laura answered, anxious to get away, and yet dying for a word about Perry. “Is Mrs Cornford well?”

“She's as cross as two sticks—oh, my! Binnie, there goes the policeman who scolded us for jumping over the rails. Yes,

you may look at us if you like, old Crusty!" and Miss Tommie returned the calm inspection of her Majesty's guardian of the peace with a gesture of defiance.

"I am afraid we must go," Laura said, growing more and more frightened at Prissy's consternation and comments to come. "Give my love to Mrs Cornford, please."

"It's no use," Mimi said; "Aunty's too cross and glum to care about anybody's love. I'll say I've seen you."

"Is anything the matter?" asked Laura.

"Yes, a great deal is the matter," Mimi answered; "Papa Peter is paralysed, and Aunty has to take care of him."

"And Aunty's last picture didn't sell, though it was such a beauty," added Binnie.

"And we have had an execution in the house—we have!" said Tommie.

"And Perry has never come home, and we don't know what's become of him any more than the fishes at the bottom of the sea," Mimi put in; adding by way of a climax, "that's what puts Aunty out."

Laura's heart was beating fast, but she encountered Prissy's criticising eyes, and for the life of her dared not stay to hear any more.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said, giving a hand to each. "Tell Mrs Cornford I will write to her. We must go now."

"Let us go a little way with you. I'll walk with her," proposed Binnie, seizing Prissy by the hand, as unconscious of being obnoxious as any little pariah of a dog which takes friendly notice of a fine lady's pet.

But Laura made some incoherent excuse, and hurried away. Prissy burst out into exclamations of surprise ere they were fairly off. Before they were out of earshot, however, a shrill cry reached them from the distance, and looking round, they beheld Miss Binnie performing pantomimic gestures on the pavement.

"Do come and see us one day," she cried, pitching her voice to its highest key. "There's little bricks."

And Tommie echoed in the same tone—"Little bricks!"

This scene, as may well be imagined, afforded no small

amusement to the passers-by ; but poor Laura turned scarlet with mortification, and Prissy was horrified beyond measure. Prissy was as practical a little person as could well be, knowing exactly what was the conventional worth of good clothes and good manners ; and to be accosted in the public streets by such a vagabond crew seemed terrible to her.

"O Laura ! " she said, " how can you like such rude girls ! —and they had got on black stockings too, full of holes ! "

"They didn't mean any harm," Laura said ; " and as to their clothes and manners, we needn't glorify ourselves because we are not like them. I dare say they are just as good as we are."

And as usual, Laura's Paradise—in other words, Mrs Cornford and her people—proved a bone of contention between the sisters, and Dr Norman had to settle the dispute.

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## CHAPTER LV.

### *POLLY CORNFORD PREACHES A SERMON.*

LAURA'S recital of Mrs Cornford's troubles touched Dr Norman's kind heart. Though he was too deeply engrossed in his work to think much of anything else, he formed one or two hasty plans on her behalf. The first was, that he would ask her to take his little daughters' portraits. But there were two arguments against such an arrangement. He could not afford the portraits, and he did not wish Laura's acquaintance with Mrs Cornford to be renewed. The second was, that he should call upon her and offer such pecuniary services as lay in his power ; but from this proceeding he recoiled on further reflection. At last it occurred to him that Laura and Prissy had begged him on many occasions to let them buy a little mirror for their bandbox of a drawing-room ; why should not one of poor Mrs Cornford's pictures do as well ? Accordingly he called Laura into his room one day and made the proposal. Laura was enchanted. Dr Norman gave her the money forthwith, and she set off in the direction of Fulham, happy as some escaped bird flying back to its native woods.

She knew that she should not see Perry, that the sound of his

name was as forbidden fruit to her ; but to breathe the air of his old home, to see not one but a hundred things belonging to him, to be brought into never so slight a contact with the people who loved him, and the places that knew him—this, if anything, seemed happiness to her. She forgot the dreary disenchantment she had experienced in Paris, and all the roystering discomfort of the little household in the Rue de Trévisé, in her great delight. The chirping of the sparrows, and what signs she read of the spring-tide as she walked along—if, indeed, there are signs of spring-tide in London—filled her heart with exhilaration. The world was a happy place, and she was a happy thing once more.

At Mrs Cornford's house she did not meet with a gracious reception.

"Missus," the little maid-of-all-work answered, "was very cross, and couldn't see company."

"And the young ladies ?" asked Laura.

"What young ladies ?" repeated the maid-of-all-work. "Oh ! I suppose you mean Tommie and the rest of 'em ? Well, they're at the dyer's, and have been there for a week," speaking of Mrs Cornford's nieces as if they were clothes gone to be dyed.

"But I am sure Mrs Cornford will see me if you tell her my name," Laura said. "I have come on business, and must see her."

Thereupon a door was opened from above, and Mrs Cornford's voice was heard asking of Mary Hann, as the maid-of-all-work was called, "What was the row ?"

"Do let me come up just for a minute, dear Mrs Cornford," Laura said, entreatingly ; "I have really something to say."

"Up with you, then ; you're like a bad shilling, Laura, always coming back ; but even a bad shilling that sticks to you is welcome in this inconstant world," she said, and gave Laura a hearty kiss as they met on the little landing-place.

"Why, how pretty you've grown !" Mrs Cornford added, holding the young girl out at arm's length. "Eyes as blue as aquamarine, cheeks as pink as pea-blossoms, dainty little chin fit for Titian to paint ! My ! give me another kiss. 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,' though you haven't a sixpence of your own to keep the devil out of your pocket."

"O Mrs Cornford!" Laura said, holding her hand still,  
"I am so sorry"—

"Don't be sorry for my skin, but take care of your own," says the eel who is caught to the eel in the mud. An ass gets beaten because he behaves like an ass, and not because of his long ears; and if I get into scrapes, who's to blame but myself? But come into my studio. I'm at work with a—model."

Laura followed her friend into the studio—how well she remembered meeting Perry there for the first time!—and naturally walked up to the easel. A very commonplace-looking man, with an unpleasant face, sat attitudinising at one end of the room; but Mrs Cornford begged him to go and smoke his pipe, and otherwise amuse himself for the present.

"What a very ugly model!" Laura said; "but I see what your picture is—*The Young Prince in the Tower*, and for the gaoler he does very well."

"Oh! the picture is a mere pot-boiler," Mrs Cornford said, with an odd mixture of embarrassment and amusement, "and the man is not a regular model. He—he is staying in the house, and sat to oblige me, that's all."

Laura was far too simple to divine Mrs Cornford's meaning.  
"He is not handsome, certainly," she said.

"Ugly trades make ugly tradesmen," Mrs Cornford blurted out; "and gaolers are not handsome, either in pictures or real life. But what is it that you had to say to me?"

Laura told her errand with some hesitation. Papa had given Prissy and herself the money wherewithal to buy a mirror for their tiny drawing-room, and they would so much rather have a little picture of Mrs Cornford's.

"Any little picture," she added, in childish phrase, bringing out her two ten-pound notes.

Mrs Cornford's conduct was thereupon extraordinary. Without saying one word, she took the two ten-pound notes in her hand, and holding them over her head, performed an exhilarated *pas seul* in the middle of the room; then she went down-stairs. Laura heard a hurried confabulation with the so-called model, the street-door slammed, and Mrs Cornford returned, empty-handed and brisk.

"I've got rid of him!" she said, dropping into a chair.  
"We part the best of friends, but may we never meet again,  
says I to my gentleman?"

"Has he been making himself disagreeable?" asked little Laura, as much in the dark as ever.

Mrs Cornford burst into a hearty laugh.

"You dear little simpleton! Don't you know that the best Christians make themselves disagreeable when you owe them money? And though I didn't owe him money, he came to look after money I owed other people. But having got rid of the—the model, we'll choose the picture."

"Give us something you can't sell," Laura said; "we shall be delighted to possess any picture of yours."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" Mrs Cornford answered, impatiently. "Do you take me for a thief? When fools don't get their money's worth, what knaves the wise must be. And though you spoke like a little idiot just now, as good a twenty-pounds' worth of brains as you would get elsewhere you shall have out of my studio."

"How nice to possess so many beautiful pictures of one's own!" Laura said, innocently, as canvas after canvas was taken from the wall.

"It isn't nice at all, goosey; and if times had gone well with us artists lately, I should have had a clear studio."

"Oh! I was so sorry your large picture did not sell," Laura said.

"Who told you that?" asked Polly, sharply.

"Binnie, when we met in the street the other day."

"Whew! now I see which way the wind blows," Mrs Cornford said. "If I had been as thriving as a caterpillar in a cabbage, you wouldn't have wanted a picture, would you?"

Laura coloured painfully.

"Papa"—she began, faltering.

"Well, my dear, we won't quarrel about it. A windfall is as good as an apple bought at the market any day. But to think of your daddy concerning himself about me! 'What with the gratitude and the ingratitude of the world, I don't

know where I am,' says the donkey to the hay he likes and the cudgel he doesn't. And I can tell you, little Laura, that I've had more to do with the cudgels than the hay lately."

"Poor Mr Petroffsky is paralysed, Binnie said."

"Oh! that's nothing. One just gets him up in the morning, and puts him to bed at night, feeds him as if he were a child, and keeps him warm, and there's an end to it; but it's the way the young ones go on that makes me wonder what the world is coming to! Look at Kitty: I loved her as her own mother ought to have done (but didn't), and how does she behave to me now?"

"Doesn't Kitty write to you?" Laura asked.

"Of course she writes, but I no more value her letters than if they were dishonoured bills. She calls me her dearest Polly, says she loves me, and fills two sheets with all sorts of pretty things. What is all that worth? Not a ha'porth of straw to light a fire with. Oh! how I hate words!"

"Kitty has treated us all badly," Laura said; "but I shall always love her."

"That's where we're all fools alike," Mrs Cornford went on bitterly. "We are like dogs, who love our masters the better when they beat us. I never beat my dogs, and the consequence is they don't care a pin for me."

"Dear Mrs Cornford, you must not say that."

"What's the use of saying the contrary, if it isn't true? Look at my chicks; I've gone hungry that they should be filled before now; and I'd paint signboards rather than let them want, any day; they are twice as fond of their fine-lady aunt, who sees them once or twice a year, and gives them nothing but her old clothes. They pay no heed to what I say—they won't lend a helping hand in the house; if my back is turned, Petroffsky gets no dinner. They wouldn't go to the dyer's and earn sixpence a day now, only I bribed them with a shilling each to begin."

"It's very trying," Laura said.

"Then look at Perry," Mrs Cornford went on; "no one knows how I love that boy! What does he care? He goes on his travels, and lets me wait and wait for news of him, till

I could cry my eyes out with suspense, if I had two pairs of 'em, one for ornament and one for use."

Laura's eyes filled now, partly with concern for Perry, partly out of sympathy for her old friend.

"Dear Mrs Cornford!" she said, kissing her.

"Oh, bother! I'm like the Irishman in the song," she said, putting the little thing away with a sort of bearish good-nature. "'Tis sentiment kills me,' says I. I didn't mean to talk of that boy, only he belongs to the lot, and has served me the worst of all. It isn't the last hair that breaks the camel's back, but the hand that lays it on; and if the others had robbed me, or played worse tricks, I wouldn't have minded, so long as Perry's heart was in the right place."

"Is it so very long since you heard from Mr Perugino?" asked Laura.

"So long that he is either dead, or doesn't trouble his head about us poor fools crying at home. I shouldn't wonder if he has married a Mahometan woman."

"Oh, dear!"

"He can't have Kitty, you know, and when men are disappointed in love, one woman is much the same to them as another. Besides," Mrs Cornford added, by way of physicking Laura's moral nature, and warning her off possible shoals and quicksands of sentiment in the future, "Perry could no more support a wife than he could say the Proverbs of Solomon backwards standing on his head."

A pause followed this speech, and Laura began to think of going; yet she lingered and lingered.

"May I call again if I am passing this way?" she said.

"Come when you like, but go when I please; that is my motto about visitors, Miss Laura. Tell papa if he likes to change the picture at any time, he can do so. I hope you children are good to him."

And then Laura went away, saddened by her visit, yet unspeakably glad to have set foot in her paradise once more. It was a deserted paradise, but a paradise still.

## CHAPTER LVI.

*PERRY'S WANDERINGS CONTINUED.*

MEANTIME, where was Perry?

When he found that the yacht bearing Kitty had flown from Algiers like a bird, none knew whither, his heart was filled with disappointment, bitterness, and dismay. It seemed to him that not only Kitty's thoughts, but instincts also, warred against his peace; and he fancied himself shunned as well as despised. Well, nothing remained but to hate her as he could, and go on his own way! He had tried to ruin himself in Paris, body and soul, by absinthe and bad company, and the experiment failed. He had tried in Spain to lead the life of a more harmless vagabond, serenading bright eyes, singing *coplas*, and dancing *boleras* at village inns with village beauties, giving his soul to Nature, and his heart to the first pleasure that came in his way; and this experiment had failed also. Now he was determined to let things take their course, without an effort in any direction. He would neither try to sink nor swim, but would let the waves do with him as they would.

Bohemia, like Freemasonry, has its pass-word all the world over, and Perry soon made friends to whose board and purse—when not empty—he was always welcome.

When April came the weather grew burning hot. The Sahel was carpeted with flowers of unspeakable splendour; the Atlas mountains looked faint as a cloud against the warm blue sky; a sirocco made the town like a furnace, save where some fountain bubbled in the court of some dusky mosque. Perry's temperament did not bear heat well, and, after a week's enthusiasm and hard work, he longed to get away. One of his new friends, a writer for the *Moniteur d'Algérie* and other local papers, was deputed to report a celebrated trial coming off at a place called Teniet, in the mountains. Would Monsieur Perugino go with him? He could get there for almost nothing, and a finer sight for an artist than the cedar forest of Teniet was not to be seen in the world.

To cram his clothes into a valise, to get a Napoleon or two on

the security of sketches worth twenty pounds, to leave others in his landlady's charge, by way of apology for not paying a month's rent—all this was the work of a few minutes; and then he started, feeling as happy as a bird and no less free. He had neglected to write to poor Polly Cornford lately, from sheer idleness, and he said to himself that he would send her a letter from the cedar forest.

But in this he was reckoning without his host. When he beheld the unutterable majesty of the cedars, whether seen in spring-like sunshine, in clouds of mist, or in snow-storms—for the climate of Teniet varies with magical rapidity—he forgot everything except that he was a genius, and that the sight of beautiful scenery made him obviously happy. Was it any wonder that poor Polly went without her letter from day to day and from week to week?

Meantime, the trial came to an end; three or four Arabs were condemned to death for the murder of colonists, and Perry's friend had to return to Algiers and his newspaper.

Perry had made dozens of sketches, and had finished one small picture, all of which he now entrusted, well-packed, to his friend.

"Don't take them to my lodgings," he said, "or they'll be confiscated by the laundress, the restaurateur, and the Jew who let me have my Moorish scimitar on credit, but ship them straight off to London." And somehow it happened that the address—Madame Confor, Paradise Place, London, Fulham, Middlesex, Angleterre—was written by the reporter, and not by Perry himself.

When Perry's fit of rapturous enthusiasm and industry was over, love of adventure again took possession of him, and he went hyena-hunting with a party of gay young French officers, miles away in the plain.

Sleeping in tents is delightful to those who love the wondrous sunrises of the South, and do not suffer from ague! Poor Perry was knocked down by malarian fever ere he had seen, much less killed, a hyena, and lay tossing in alternate paroxysms of heat and cold, to the great distress of his kind companions. Each had a little theory of his own about

malaria, and practised it upon Perry to the best of his skill. He was dosed with quinine one day, with concoctions of herbs the next—was fomented, plastered, mesmerised, charmed, and Heaven only knows what ; but, in spite of all these infallible remedies, grew no better. Then a carriage was written for, and poor Perry went back to Teniet like a disabled soldier from a campaign. There, thanks to the exquisite mountain air, rational treatment, and good nursing, he began to pick up a little strength and spirit.

All this time Mrs Cornford was looking out for news of Perry, as a mother whose only son is at sea. When she heard the last postman's knock in the street at night, her heart never stopped beating tumultuously till the sound died away. Then she sat down to the family supper in extreme bitterness of soul, wondering whether, indeed, there was such a thing as constant affection in all the world.

Little Vittoria, now Madame Puig, tried to comfort her old friend with the acquired solemnity of a few months' wife-hood.

"Dearest Polly," she would say, "I know—I feel that Perugino is only somewhat remiss, and that in his heart of hearts he is as true as my Victor. Why, I should believe in my Victor's affection if he were in Algérie, and never wrote to me for a year."

"Proving one's self a fool doesn't prove another person an angel," Mrs Cornford said. "I dare say no harm has happened to the boy, and that he means nothing unkind ; but don't attempt to pity me for my bunions till you've got a corn, then we will cry out together—Why did we ever wear tight shoes!"

"I don't think either of us wear tight shoes in that sense," Vittoria said.

"Well, corns don't come of their own accord," Polly answered ; "and mine let me have no rest by night or day. I'm not dirty particular where my affections are concerned ; I can put up with as many slights and crosses as most people ; but there's always one pill we can't swallow, with the best intentions in the world, and that boy's behaviour is mine."

When Perry's case of drawings arrived, addressed to her in

a strange handwriting, Mrs Cornford believed that her boy had fallen ill in Algeria, and had there died.

Things were going a little better with her at this epoch of our history. Vittoria and her husband *Piggie*, as Mrs Cornford affectionately termed him, helped to pay the rent, to look after poor old Petroffsky, and to scold Tommie and her wild crew into something like decent behaviour. One or two friends of Dr Norman's had bought little pictures ; her winter's work was flatteringly spoken off by the hanging committee of the Royal Academy ; and Vittoria's sisters promised to take Mimi as an apprentice to photography at midsummer. She felt no immediate want of money ; she painted better than ever.

But prosperity comes with almost an insupportable bitterness when we cannot share it with the one who is the light of our eyes ; and Perry was the light of Polly Cornford's eyes. As a woman weeps for her lover, as a wife weeps for her husband, as a mother weeps for her only son, she wept in secret for him.

And none in the little community felt very hopeful now about Perry's fate. Blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-complexioned people do not bear tropical heats and disorders very well. Perry, moreover, was rash to the last degree where his health was concerned, and had never been robust : added to which, the Algerian season had been reported in the newspapers as an exceptionally unfavourable one.

Perry's boon companions, who used to drop in for the pleasure of abusing him, now ceased to inquire whether he had written, and one or two lacked courage to come at all. He was ever the spoiled child of the little community : not the most popular person, like Kitty, but the most beloved. All Bohemia went into mourning, which was none the less real because wanting outward symbols of crape.

Mrs Cornford spoke in parables as much as ever, ate, drank, toiled, and span ; but is that sorrow alone real which leads us out of the world to fast and weep and refuse consolation ?

It was quite by chance that Laura heard of Mrs Cornford's supposed loss, for she had never found an excuse to visit her again. At her father's dinner-table one evening, the conversation happened to turn on the particular set of artists to which Perry belonged.

"I don't know how it is that, with all their talents, they do so little," said Dr Norman's guest, himself an artist. "Look at Perugino Neeve, who painted 'An English Autumn Eve!' Three years ago I prophesied for that young fellow one of the finest positions among our rising artists; but he has done nothing since; and I have just heard that he has died of malaria in Algeria."

"I hope that the report may prove a false one," Dr Norman said. "We know something of Mr Neeve and his friends."

And then, after a little more talk of Perry, the subject was dismissed, as if it were not of more than ordinary moment.

Poor Laura had flushed to the brow on hearing such terrible news of Perry, and it was with a great effort that she could maintain anything like composure during the rest of the evening. As soon as she escaped to her own room, she wrote a passionate letter to Mrs Cornford, which was posted that night, entreating to know more particulars of this rumoured calamity.

With what agitation Laura heard the postman's knock next day, it may well be imagined. She could not eat, she could not employ herself—she could only sit by the window, waiting and watching. At length came the following note from Mrs Cornford, written with paint on a scrap of drawing-paper:—

"DEAR LAURA,—Perry has written to nobody. If he is alive, he is a bad boy. If he is dead, of course we shall call him an angel. I should like to have had three bundles of hay to choose from if I had been a donkey. How can I believe that Perry is dead!—or that he is alive! I've done the best for his picture anyhow.—Yours, P.C."

Laura wrote a long letter of condolence to her friend, which Mrs Cornford did not read. There the correspondence ended. The summer came on apace, and still Perry gave no sign.

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## CHAPTER LVII.

### SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY.

KITTY started on the yacht voyage determined to marry Sir George Bartelotte; Ella was equally determined not to have her dearest friend for her stepmother. How were these parallel lines to meet? Two months of pleasant distraction

had slipped by, and neither Kitty nor Ella had yielded an inch. The obnoxious subject was wholly ignored for the most part, but whenever it came up each felt a transient bitterness towards her friend.

"Kitty says she loves me better than anything in the world," reasoned Ella, "and yet she cannot see how this wretched marriage must come between us. If we were indifferent to each other, there would be no cause for me to raise objection to it."

"Ella is so sweet and unselfish," Kitty thought, "and she cannot understand that I am capable of unselfishness too. I suppose all women, even the angelic ones, are jealous by nature."

Thus they naturally went on misjudging and misinterpreting each other. It was as little likely that Ella should comprehend Kitty's ambitious eagerness, as that Kitty should comprehend Ella's generous scruples.

Between father and daughter, the subject had been tabooed from the beginning. Once or twice Sir George made a feeble effort on behalf of himself and his bride-elect; but Ella's deprecatory look and word were enough to awe him into immediate silence.

He was always saying to himself—To-day I will speak out, or to-morrow I will constrain Ella to listen; but to-day and to-morrow passed away, and he had not spoken out.

There were more reasons than one why Sir George was so eager to consummate this marriage. In the first place, he was in love with Kitty after a fashion. In the second, it was reasonable to hope that a young wife would bring him an heir. In the third, he had a man's natural wish to bequeath the estates that had come to him from his father to a son of his own. Poor Sir George felt that such a blessing would indeed be a recompence for the crosses that had befallen him, and the upright and Christian career on which he prided himself. The anticipation of it made his heart light and his step elate.

If only Ella would listen!

Ella's uncompromising attitude drove him to Kitty for consolation. It was like a sudden descent from mountain regions of perpetual snow to soft green meadows, laughing streams and hedgerows full of flowers.

When they were alone Kitty petted Sir George, as only women like Kitty can pet men or women whose liking they covet. She said all sorts of pretty things, that meant little enough, but effected a good deal ; for Sir George felt himself younger, more confident, and of more worth in the world, for hours after. She told him, moreover, that nothing short of Ella's persistent opposition should induce her to break the promise she had given him—“Because I should be so wretched away from you now”—she would say with insinuating fondness. Whereupon Sir George would fondly kiss the pretty hand that was never withdrawn, swearing to reward her for such constancy, and to stand by her as long as she lived.

When a young and beautiful woman makes love to a man double her years, he is sure to lose his head, whether he possesses a heart or no ; and Sir George soon lost his head under the influence of Kitty's fascination. One day a gale was blowing, which was a lucky gale for Kitty. Excepting Sir George and Kitty, no one could keep his sea-legs, so that they had the deck to themselves, and many a pleasant tête-à-tête. Blessed by the gods are those mortals who know not what it is to suffer from sea-sickness ! and Kitty and Sir George felt a little superior to common humanity in being thus exempted from the common fate, and made a good deal of each other in consequence.

With Kitty leaning on his arm, Kitty looking up into his eyes, Kitty's caressing words sounding in his ears, Sir George became intoxicated. Never before had Kitty allowed him to taste the sweets of courtship ; never before had she frankly and fondly talked of the future they were to spend together ; never before had she said how dear his affection was to her.

Truth to tell, Kitty's patience was giving way a little. She rebelled equally against Ella's wistful hostility, and against Sir George's long-continued supineness. Such a state of things could not go on for ever. Come what might, she determined to act boldly.

After all this friendly talk, with just a little show of shyness on Kitty's part, by way of tempting Sir George's outspoken admiration, she said, blushing and sighing—

"But of what use for us to build up so many card-houses, which dear Ella is sure to blow down? Most likely the end will be, that I shall leave you as I came, a poor outcast, and never once set foot in Akenholme Park."

"By George, no, no, I say!" exclaimed Sir George. "If I live, you shall be mistress of Akenholme, and who knows but that it may go down to some of my name yet? You will manage things beautifully, too, for that poor darling girl when anything happens to me"—

"Oh, how can you talk of such cruel things?" Kitty said.

"My dear, I did not mean to be cruel. It is only right to speak of the future. Ella has got plenty of faculty, but she is a little inclined to be over-generous, and, without some friendly guidance, would inevitably cripple her resources. Now, you are the very soul of prudence."

"You think much too highly of me," Kitty began.

"Nonsense. I should be a fool if I did not know what a treasure I had won in you. Why, I do believe you will cost me less as my wife than as Ella's companion," Sir George said, gushingly. "And then the difference to me in comfort!"

"I think I could make you comfortable—I am sure I could," Kitty answered, "if Ella will only let me try."

"She will—she must!" Sir George said. "I have no influence over her whatever, but I am sure she will listen to you."

"She did not listen before."

"Suppose you try once more?" Sir George ventured to suggest.

"I cannot help thinking that the second overtures would come better from yourself," Kitty said, feeling, in truth, hardly courageous enough to fight Sir George's battles with Ella over again.

Sir George was silent, but, by the curious contortion that passed over his features, she saw how unpalatable was the advice.

After a little reflection, he said, briskly—

"I really see no necessity of speaking to Ella any more. She knows well enough what you and I have determined upon. Let us follow our own devices, and take her consent for granted."

"Would that be quite fair towards Ella?" Kitty asked.

"What can we do that she will consider quite fair?"

"Ah, true."

"It is only the first step that costs," Sir George added. "Dear Ella cannot fail to see, by and by, that your marriage with me will be for her own good; and till that time we must bear her vexation as best we can. The sooner all is settled the better, I say."

This was exactly what Kitty had thought for a long time, but she listened in silence.

"We might as well be married quietly when we get back to Gibraltar or Malaga; don't you think so?"

"That is for you alone to decide," Kitty made answer, modestly.

"I decide in favour of the proposition, taking it for granted, of course, that you have no womanish notions about trousseaux and that sort of thing."

Kitty had very womanish notions about trousseaux "and that sort of thing," but was too much overcome by her lover's condescending goodness to confess her weakness. Sir George went on—

"You will find me a much more practical person to deal with than Ella, who, I verily believe, would spend every penny she possesses in decking you out with finery. Beauty unadorned is adorned the most, to my thinking; and you always look handsomer than other women, no matter how you dress."

Kitty acknowledged the compliment, though in her sacred heart she prized beyond expression the adornments of the outer woman he seemed to think supererogatory. She was too well satisfied, however, with Sir George's new mode to cavil at minor mortifications, and had, moreover, schooled herself resolutely into an attitude of meekness.

"I have, indeed, won a treasure in this girl," Sir George thought, "who has so taken to heart the teachings of adversity. What other woman would recognise her true position—as she does—to the nicety of a hair?"

And as the rest of the party lay prostrate in their berths, and the sailors were busy, he snatched a kiss from the object

of his affections by way of rewarding her for her meekness, and himself for his generous behaviour.

Thus the matter was settled, and Kitty felt sure at last that she should become Lady Bartelotte.

As soon as the weather improved, their companions crept on deck one by one. The first happened to be Mr Tyrrell, and he was so impressed by the confidential and affectionate tone Sir George and Kitty assumed towards each other, that he could not resist running down-stairs, and imparting his suspicions to the owner of the yacht, Colonel Fellowes. Colonel Fellowes, of course, repeated the story to his wife, and from her it went the round of the ladies, excepting Ella.

A spice of scandal at sea, how good and acceptable it is! Every one felt quite grateful to Sir George and Kitty for breaking the general monotony so kindly. Ella was not slow to interpret the sly looks and signs interchanged by her friends on every side; nor was she less slow to understand Kitty's somewhat artificial though devoted manner towards herself, and Sir George's affected ease and unaffected hilarity. Kitty, moreover, wore a ring of Sir George's giving. There was no need to ask questions. The truth was so plain that those who ran might read.

In Ella's pure heart waged a terrible conflict. She would fain have exonerated Kitty from blame, and loved her as dearly as ever; but some strong spell seemed to hold her back. Perhaps she did love her as dearly as ever; only how terrible are our affections when the leaven of mistrust has leavened the whole lump!

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

BUT Ella could not support her unhappy scruples long. The atmosphere of solitude and mistrust was so unbearable, that she determined to come down from the high level on which Kitty's spirit had once moved in unison with her own, and abide where Kitty willed. She reasoned with herself thus:—“Kitty is surely not to blame if her ideal of life and conduct

is less lofty than mine ; I am rather to blame for carrying an inborn and nurtured fastidiousness into my affections. She is what she is as much by the force of circumstances as I am myself. We must have patience—God only knows how much ! —with those we love."

What Ella suffered in this conflict can hardly be told. To her loving, religious nature, Kitty had come as a sweet pariah from the outer world of sin and suffering, and she had set herself the task of turning the pariah into an angel. Loving Kitty devotedly as she did, she had hitherto borne the moral defects of this superbly endowed, captivating, enthusiastic creature, hoping to see them amended in time. But now what hope was there for Kitty ? Was she not selling herself to a title ? Was she not forfeiting all that good women hold dear and sacred—the close affection and friendship of married life ?

Kitty had said that but for her friend, she would never have promised to marry Sir George ; and Ella knew well that she believed such a statement to be true. Would Sir George have had to go away an unaccepted wooer, in any case ? Ella doubted. There was only one Kitty in all the world, however, and Ella felt that she could forgive even more at her hands than this. Accordingly, when the two girls were next alone, Ella's icy mood melted, and she clasped her friend's hand, saying tearfully—

"I hope you will be happy in your own way, dear Kitty. If I have been angry that your way is not mine, I am sure you forgive me."

Of course Kitty declared that she had nothing to forgive, and they kissed like children who had quarrelled about a cake. After a great many protestations on Kitty's part of her entire self-abnegation and devotion to Ella in the future—why was it that the loyal Ella made no promises ?—the conversation naturally fell upon wedding-clothes, and other topics of the same kind. There is a comic vein running through every tragedy, no matter how dismal it may be ; and after the agonies of dismay, suspense, and apprehension described in these later pages, all the comedy of Sir George Bartelotte's engagement to Kitty Silver came out.

Having secured his bride, his whole being seemed concentrated on the economic arrangements of his new household. He was like a miser who has indulged a whim in buying a pretty tame bird, and begrudges his pet any but the cheapest cage and the commonest food. That Sir George's bird would rebel against its ugly prison and uninviting fare, never once occurred to him. On the contrary, he was always chuckling over Kitty's good luck, and congratulating himself for disinterestedly making her the mistress of his house and the partner of his fortunes. He dared not talk to Ella in this strain ; but "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh," and Ella, perforce, heard much that was unpalatable to her.

To his bride elect he was more communicative, and a person less good-natured than Miss Kitty Silver must have resented his prosaic, not to say indelicate way of putting things. For instance, his eye fell by chance one day on an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper, headed *A Trousseau for Twenty Pounds*, which he cut out and brought to Kitty in high glee. After all, a penniless wife was not so very expensive a luxury, if her wants could be kept within reasonable bounds, and a trousseau for twenty pounds was certainly reasonable !

"What is your opinion?" he asked of Kitty, as her eye ran over the advertisement.

"It would be as well to have samples," said Miss Kitty artfully, determined not to displease her lover, and not to have the trousseau for twenty pounds.

"That is an excellent idea. Ah ! you will not be imposed upon, I see. If Ella were only like you ! but don't say a word to her about this advertisement, for she would think me much too miserly and interfering. And what about your allowance in the future ?"

"That is for you to determine," Kitty answered.

"Nonsense ! What can a man know about the price of ladies' clothes ? I only know that I have heard my poor mother say, she and her five sisters had to dress upon thirty pounds a year each ; and they were of the very best blood in England."

Kitty cast down her eyes very meekly.

"If I had only myself to consider, I could dress upon almost any sum," she said: "but, as your wife, I must keep up a certain appearance."

"Oh! these women, these women!" sighed Sir George Barletotte, "how they befool us with their handsome eyes and insinuating ways!" Then he waited for what Kitty should say, quaking with fear, and determined at any cost to hold his own.

"Pray understand that I wish to avoid meanness on the one hand as well as indiscretion on the other," he said, at last growing impatient. "Tell me in plain English what a 'certain appearance' means in L. S. D.?"

Kitty still paused irresolute.

"Would a hundred pounds a year hit the mark, eh?" asked her lover, eagerly. "If a hundred pounds isn't liberal for a poor devil like myself, I don't know what is."

"O, Sir George!" Kitty said, smiling sweetly; "as if the beggar-maid did not accept whatever King Cophetua chose to bestow upon her, and be thankful!"

"But it is better to be business-like and know where we are. I always like to know where I am in money matters," said the bridegroom elect, eagerly. "Can you dress like a lady, and keep your temper on an allowance of a hundred pounds a year?"

Kitty burst out laughing, and laying one little hand on Sir George's arm, looked up comically and caressingly into his face.

"I should make a point of being good-tempered," she answered, "but I can't answer for the other. You see, it takes twice as much stuff to make me a gown as it does most women—I am so tall, so unfortunately tall," she repeated, rearing her neck and surveying herself from head to foot with a very pardonable amount of satisfaction.

This little bit of coquetry so fascinated Sir George, that he committed himself to an ebullition of generosity on the spot.

"On my soul," he said, "I can refuse you nothing. Well, then, let us say a hundred and fifty. That will do, won't it?"

And poor Kitty, whose ambitions had aimed much higher, felt compelled to say Yes, and look delighted. How often in the day was she obliged to say Yes, and look delighted, when her inmost heart was full of rebellion!

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The matter of allowance being settled to Sir George's entire satisfaction, another no less important filled his mind. Since the fact of his engagement to Kitty had become an accepted one, she had assumed a sort of half-playful, half-serious, wife-like manner towardshim, that he found inexpressibly bewitching. If only bewitching things did not interfere with one's purse !

For instance, no sooner was Kitty put in the sort of authority over him which the position of affianced wife implies, than she began to scold and tease him about his shabby clothes. She attached that overweening importance to appearances which people of inferior or uncertain breeding are sure to do, and thought it an affair of exceeding importance whether or not Sir George wore a threadbare coat, or a hat that cost less than his neighbour's. Of course, it flattered her elderly lover mightily to be told that he looked well in such and such a dress, and ill in another ; but what Kitty found becoming was sure to cost the most money, and love *versus* economy waged fierce war in the baronet's heart.

Had he kept his own counsel, all would have been well ; but he was so anxious to approve himself generous in the eyes of the world, that his meanness became more apparent than ever. First he went to Mr Tyrrell for advice, then to Lady Gardiner, and so on, making the complete round of his acquaintance, till soon not a creature on board but knew what was passing in his mind.

"That dear girl," he said once to Lady Gardiner, "has the most astounding capacity of any woman I ever knew. Between ourselves, few young ladies would realise her position as she does ; for no matter how charming and handsome a penniless girl may be, the man who marries her makes a sacrifice."

"Under some circumstances," said Lady Gardiner, smiling. She bore Kitty no grudge for having superseded her daughter Constance, and thought it a good opportunity to take down the baronet's vanity.

"Exactly," Sir George replied ; "and, devoted as I am to dear Ella's friend, I can but feel that the sacrifice entailed upon me is enormous. Miss Silver has not a penny—absolutely not a penny !"

"O, Sir George! what is money in comparison to her many gifts and sweet temper?"

It was not to be expected of Lady Gardiner, the mother of fading unmarried daughters, to add—"her beauty."

"True; but the predicament in which I find myself is most trying to a man's judgment. How can I behave so as to prove my devotion to Kitty, and at the same time avoid parsimony and lavishness? Now, if you were to give my dear Kitty a little motherly advice, I should be more grateful than I can tell you."

"But it seems to me that she is too sensible to need any counsel of mine."

"She has certainly showed admirable discretion in dealing with the question of our domestic arrangements hitherto; but the misgiving crosses my mind whether she may not sometimes think me over-cautious in money matters. I am a poor man, Lady Gardiner—a very poor man; and it is my earnest wish to prevent Kitty from feeling any disappointment in the future. I wish you would enlighten her mind as to the possibility of baronets being poor as well as artists and authors, and the people she has lived among."

"I must think your poverty is a pet bugbear of your own, dear Sir George," Lady Gardiner answered, incredulously; "but I will pour any amount of doleful tales into Kitty's ears about out-of-elbow aristocracy, if you like."

"Indeed, you are wrong," cried George; then with an expression of alarm—"I am as poor as any church mouse going; and if it were not for Ella's sake—and another consideration equally weighty—ahem—I would never have permitted myself to dream of marrying again. Pray do not inoculate Kitty with such notions."

"Did I not promise to conjugate the verb—*To want money*—in all its moods and tenses for Miss Silver's benefit?" asked Lady Gardiner, saucily. "I'm not good at grammar, but I know that conjugation by heart."

And then she began—"To want money.

"Very active verb indeed—governing all cases of personal pronouns; declined as much as possible:—

I want money,  
Thou wantest money,  
He wants money."

Sir George interrupted her a little pettishly, thinking her conduct rather flippant.

"It would be more to the purpose if you could persuade Kitty that a lady's dress needn't cost more than a hundred pounds a year!" he said. "She has made me promise to allow her half as much again, but I am convinced that it is an extravagance!"

Of course this story went the round of the ladies, and reached the ears of one or two of the men. The former mostly blamed Kitty, the latter pitied her. But Kitty did not as yet pity herself.

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## CHAPTER LIX.

"THERE is always one pill you cannot swallow," was a favourite proverb of Mrs Cornford's, and it applied to herself with full force throughout the long summer of suspense that followed her unlucky spring. For the fresh green leaves of the Kensington Gardens grew brown and sere, and the tide of fashionable life was slowly ebbing under the glare of a July sun, and the Fulham fields were covered with clouds of heat and dust; yet Perry gave no sign. Mrs Cornford had swallowed a great many bitter pills during the period of her lifetime with a tolerably good grace. She had been hardly used by an indifferent husband, had been imposed upon by the shiftless and shameless of her kith and kin, and trodden under foot by such of them as were doing well in the world; she had experienced enough and to spare of the ills of poverty; but kindness of heart and abundance of natural spirits had never once abandoned her. "He who can't kill a flea isn't worth a flea," she would say, in allusion to all minor troubles, and would console herself for great ones by a string of aphorisms, such as—When I've the making of the world, says the shrimp to the shrimper, you shall be I and I'll be you; but till then, eat me, and obey the laws of nature.

Or—What am I that I should escape a licking ? says every right-minded donkey.

Or—Are not our duns, debtors, and creditors men and brethren ?

This latter speech had especial reference to the friends who borrowed money of her, and the tax collector she could not pay.

Poor Polly had done her very best for Perry's sketches. One finished picture of great genius, representing the majestic Cedar Forest in a snow-storm, was sold before it appeared on the walls of the Academy ; the others were to fill a screen of a Winter Exhibition.

Perry's picture attracted all the more interest because it was rumoured that the promising young artist would never exhibit again. The report of his supposed death in Algeria had got about ; fashionable ladies stopped a few seconds longer before the picture than they would otherwise have done, and said, sighing, " How sad ! " and real judges of art monopolised it, and bent over it eagerly, criticising, admiring, deplored.

Pretty Laura's heart leaped on reading from the catalogue the words—*Cedar Forest of Teniet-el-Haad, Algeria. Perugino Nieve*; and Dr Norman must have noticed her changing colour, but for his interest in poor Perry's picture. Laura, leaning on his arm, answered mechanically to the discriminating remarks he made expressly for her benefit. The thought of Perry absorbed her to the exclusion of everything else ; and when she looked at his work, the artist's living self seemed to stand before her, animated, beautiful, beloved, as of old. Only to see him once again—once again ! Laura sighed heart-brokenly.

As the summer wore on, Dr Norman carried off his children to Switzerland, where they were joined by Regy, their German student, and all—excepting Laura—spent a happy time.

They reached home in October ; the very next day Laura walked to Fulham. The aspect of Paradise Place had never before been so dreary, to her thinking. There were dirty little boxes of faded mignonette in the windows ; dead geraniums and stocks filled the gardens ; stray cats of lean exterior wandered about ; a miserable little child was wheeling a perambulator, holding a miserable little baby, up and down the pavement ; a

cart-load of very shabby furniture was being unpacked before one door ; a melancholy monkey was performing tricks in a dingy red jacket before another, without any audience excepting the child, the baby, and the lean cats before mentioned. A heavy rain had begun to fall, but the monkey went on all the same, and the audience seemed not to mind it.

The door was opened by Mrs Cornford herself, looking a little older, a little careworn, but as genial as ever.

"Who would have thought of seeing you ?" says the devil to the parson ; "but you might go farther and fare worse," she said, kissing the young girl. "Come in and have some dinner with me. I've got a dish of tripe just in hot from the baker's, and must eat it as fast as I can without killing myself, and be off to the city."

It was barely twelve o'clock, and Laura's better-bred palate said "No" to this invitation ; but Mrs Cornford made her sit down for company's sake, and, having sat down, she felt compelled to eat.

"Fetch an extra half-pint of beer, Mary Hann," said Mrs Cornford, giving the girl some halfpence ; "and be quick about it, for you must carry up Mr 'Troffsky's dinner."

Good Mrs Cornford, who had been a guardian angel to outcasts and pariahs all her life, and who painted as well as many a man with R.A. appended to his name, was certainly one of the women with whom Lord Byron would not have elected to dine. "Don't be dirty particular," was one of her favourite axioms in matters material as well as moral ; and she saw no objection to the old-fashioned way of making fingers serve for forks and knives for spoons. She was, moreover, a *bon vivant* on a humble scale, and relished her food with the zest of health and gastronomic discrimination.

"If you've come for news, I've none to give you, so you needn't bother me with questions," she said, after a time. "Do you find the tripe good ?"

"Indeed it is," Laura answered.

"Take some more, then. We won't leave any for manners. I'm mighty glad to see you, goosey. I've been as glum lately as a thief whose friends have been put in prison."

"Are you quite alone?" asked Laura.

"The chicks have had the measles, so I packed 'em off to Ramsgate, and Vittoria and Piggy have gone back to Paris."

"Monsieur Petroffsky is here?" Laura asked.

"For a very good reason, goosey; he is so paralysed that he can't run away. But he's very good company, though his mind is almost gone, bless him! and we sing duets together as merrily as two lame bluebottles caught in a spider's web. But you don't eat."

"I have really had enough, dear Mrs Cornford."

Thereupon Mrs Cornford put her fork in the choice morsel dainty Miss Laura had left on her plate, saying, naïvely—

"God thought of thrift before the devil invented company manners, so I save my tripe, my dear, and make no apology. It's uncommon good."

At this stage of affairs happened one of those rare and happy surprises that are interwoven like golden threads in the sober tissue of human life, and make it the welcome thing it is, with all its sadness.

Mrs Cornford was about to raise her glass to her lips, having wished Laura "Long life, a pinch of good luck, and a handful of mother wit," when the cry so dear to London cats—"M——e——a——t!" was heard at the area-steps.

Now, it had been one of Perry's minor accomplishments to imitate street cries to such perfection that none but Polly Cornford ever knew when to distinguish the fictitious cat's-meat man, or lobster man, or water-cress vendor, or sweep, from the genuine one. But Polly Cornford's love for Perry had taken root in the days of his early childhood, and was as nearly like a mother's instinct as could be. She recognised her prodigal's voice at once. Dropping her glass, shaking from head to foot, turning red and pale, she had just time to exclaim: "Perry, or Perry's ghost, as true as I'm a fool!" when the door opened, and Mr Perugino himself stood before the two ladies, looking by no means like a ghost, but extremely like himself, and no little pleased at the sensation he had evidently created.

"How d'ye do, Polly?" he said, embracing her with that

good-natured condescension which over-indulged young men are apt to exercise towards their mothers, or any other good women whose love for them has never waxed cold. "How d'ye do, Polly? Better late than never, eh?"

Mrs Cornford's conduct was not precisely what might have been looked for under the circumstances. Had Perry come home sick, dejected, tatterdemalion, her tenderness would have equalled the tenderness of a mother nursing a suffering baby; but seeing him evidently in vigorous health and buoyant spirits, and, as far as appearances went, totally unmindful of the intense suffering he had caused her, the great love of the woman for once rose up in rebellion against her darling. She tried to put on a jaunty air, took her old place at the dinner-table, bade Perry sit down and eat, as she said, "not according to his deserts, but according to his welcome," and was about to help him, when her fortitude broke down, and hiding her face in the corner of the table-cloth, she cried like a child.

Perry, whose attention had been wholly absorbed by Laura during the last few minutes, and the bewitching effect of her violet velvet pelisse bordered with soft white fur, now turned to Mrs Cornford in dismay.

"Polly!" he cried, "what's the matter? Is that the way to welcome a fellow whose perils have beaten Sinbad's hollow? Thrice was I devoured of lions—nearly; thrice were my unburied bones bleached by the sun of the Sahara—at least, within an inch of it; I've been all but assassinated by wandering Bedouins, yet here I am safe and sound!"

Then he went up to his old friend, and drew away the table-cloth from her face, and smiled down upon her, and kissed her as a son might have done, and said foolish little endearing things. And Polly Cornford forgot everything except her joy that this her prodigal "was dead, and was alive again, lost and was found."

After a little further talk, Perry sat down and devoured all they gave him, rushing up-stairs in the midst to shake old Petroffsky by the hand.

Mrs Cornford sent out Mary Hann for a bottle of sparkling Bordeaux; and Laura, who had risen to take leave once or

twice, was compelled to stay and drink Perry's health. Whilst the young man ate and drank, the two ladies sat watching him with large eyes of admiration and contentment. What a beautiful beard he had got! What a delightful look of health travel had given him! Surely his eyes were bluer and his smile more winning than of old! And his very speech had caught some delicious accent—Spanish or Arabic, they knew not what—which made it more attractive than ever!

Then Perry brought out of his travelling-bag some little trinkets of Moorish fabrication, and presented his adorers each with a bracelet of Arab coins and a lion's claw, set as a charm to keep off the Evil Eye; displaying other treasures with the superior air a school-boy puts on amongst his little sisters.

But at last Laura felt that she must go. Fairyland could not last for ever. And very slowly she tied the strings of her little bonnet, and drew on her little fur-bordered gloves, Perry watching her all the while, his eyes saying welcome things. Then she shook hands with each, and walked home, with what sweet dreams and fancies floating in her mind there is no need to say!

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## CHAPTER LX.

### *TIDINGS OF KITTY.*

WHEN Laura had gone, Perry and Mrs Cornford drew their chairs closer to the fire. Perry lighted a cigarette, Mrs Cornford busied herself in roasting chestnuts on the bars, and a long confidential talk was inevitable.

Perry's evanescent gaiety passed as soon as they found themselves alone. A change came over his face, making him look years older than he had done just before, and slightly sharpening the beautiful features which betrayed every mood and passion of his frank, boyish nature. He caught hold of Mrs Cornford's hand very eagerly, and said, under his breath—

“Have you heard of her?”

“Of Kitty? Nothing good, you may be sure,” Polly re-

torted. "Expect a hull that has been stranded for twenty years to bear oak-apples, before you look for gratitude from the worldly wise."

Perry smoked away in a sober, dreary, practical mood. Formerly he would have resented so severe a stricture on Kitty; but his eyes had been opened of late. There was no denying the fact that Kitty had approved herself worldly wise.

"What have you heard?" he asked.

"Oh! the old story," Mrs Cornford said, impatiently, "An eagle doesn't forsake the carcase to chirp in the thicket with hedge-sparrows, and no more will Kitty change her nature to please you or me."

Perry grew gloomier than ever.

"Many a time have I wished myself dead on that woman's account," he said.

"The Almighty doesn't put fools out of harm's way just to oblige 'em, or where would be the examples for the wise?"

"And I grew wiser when the fever brought me so low that I verily thought my hour was come," Perry answered, smiling a little grimly. "I made a vow then, that if ever Richard was himself again, Kitty and care might go to the devil, and I would be from thenceforth a wise man."

"Keep the last part of that vow by all means," Polly said, making a somewhat satirical grimace.

"I knew well enough what you would say," Perry said, severely; "but wait and see. All I ask of you, my dear Polly, is to wait and see. The first step I take towards a reformed life is to marry sweet Laura Norman."

Mrs Cornford would have interrupted him, but he waved his hand with a lofty air of command, and continued—

"The next step I take is to paint a grand Biblical picture—called the Queen of Sheba's Halt in the Desert—and sell it for five hundred guineas."

"Say two thousand at once," Mrs Cornford put in wickedly. "The third step I take is to get elected R.A.; and the fourth, to hire a nice house in Kensington, and live in ease and plenty all the rest of my days."

"How jolly!" cried Mrs Cornford.

"You know you don't believe in me the least bit," Perry said. "You are like Kitty : you think me the most visionary creature in the world. Now, Laura Norman"—

"Oh ! the vanity of men!—who shall compass it ?" said Mrs Cornford—"who shall mortify it ? But come, my good Perry, tell me where you fell ill, and how it came about that I was so many months without hearing of you. You can make up your mind whether you will marry Laura Norman or the Queen of the Sandwich Islands to-morrow."

And she carried Perry up-stairs to Petroffsky's room, that the lonely old man might be amused by his story, which lasted till the evening came on. Then Perry went out to see one or two of his friends, who kept him till past midnight, Mrs Cornford waiting supper for him meanwhile.

After a few days he fell into his old habits—painting when the humour seized him ; playing on his piano for hours at a time ; doing the things he liked to do, and avoiding those he found irksome. He seldom mentioned Kitty's name, and always with the utmost bitterness. Mrs Cornford accepted it as a healthy sign that at last he acknowledged she did not care for him.

"She will marry that mean little beggar, Sir George Bartelotte," he had said once or twice, telling Mrs Cornford at the same time all sorts of stories he had picked up somehow about Sir George's odd ways. And, true enough, before Perry had been home a week, came the following confirmation of his fears in the *Court Journal*—the paragraph having been sent Mrs Cornford by a friend who was a dressmaker in the West End—"A marriage is about to take place between Sir George Bartelotte, Bart., of Akenholme Park, Berks, and Miss Katherine Silver, daughter of the late Reverend Nehemiah Silver, of London."

"Well done, thou daughter of Mammon !" cried Mrs Cornford, after reading the extract to Perry over their dinner-table. "May we all serve our gods as faithfully as thou hast done, and get as well rewarded ! Health and long life to my Lady Bartelotte, and a good appetite to her for the flesh-pots of Egypt."

Perry's eyes were devouring the paragraph, and he did not heed Mrs Cornford's speech.

"Come, Perugino," she said, with a little forced gaiety, "toast our old comrade. Let bygones be bygones, and wish Kitty good luck."

"I can't be a hypocrite," said poor Perry, looking utterly miserable. "She has been my perdition. Why should I wish her good luck? I hope she will be a little unhappy sometimes."

"Stuff and nonsense!" interrupted Polly. "Have you no religion in you? Do you take Kitty to be like the brute beasts, born without a soul? Do you suppose the gilt on her gingerbread is an inch thick? I've other notions, and I wish the poor thing good luck."

"You are the most extraordinarily inconsistent person in the world," Perry answered, savagely. "Had Kitty done the right thing, and married me, I suppose you would have blamed her conduct as much as you seem to approve of it now."

"Who says I approve, O paragon of donkeys?" said Mrs Cornford. "It isn't for us poor fools to judge each other, or to dole out the kicks and halfpence of this world either. If Kitty gets halfpence to day, I'm glad; and if kicks to-morrow, which there's little doubt of, I'll put salve on the bruises, and make no remarks."

"You think she will be unhappy?" asked Perry, with a touch of self-reproach. "O Kitty, Kitty!"

And saying this he rushed up-stairs to his studio, and locked himself in for the rest of the day.

The news of Kitty's approaching marriage reached Dr Norman's quiet household at the same time. Laura cut out the paragraph and sent it to Regy, who professed himself to be Kitty's devoted admirer still, and Prissy deluged her elder sister with questions about Kitty's future rank and position in the world. Dr Norman made no comment, determined to let matters take their course; but when day succeeded day, and Kitty's marriage was still the theme at meal-times, he said one morning, in a very decided tone of voice—

"Children, let this be the last talk about Miss Silver. It is right that we forgive her for the wrong she has done us; but

we can never have part or lot with her any more, and the sooner her very name is forgotten the better."

"May Laura and I talk about her when we are by ourselves," Prissy asked.

"I think you might easily find a more pleasant subject," Dr Norman said, bitterly.

"Laura doesn't care for my subjects, papa, and likes to walk for miles without speaking," Prissy said.

Laura blushed deeply.

"Settle your subject when out walking as you like," Dr Norman answered; "but, for Heaven's sake, let us have our meals in future without all this talking about Kitty."

"O papa, dear, how cross we are to-day!" cried pert Miss Prissy, patting his hand reprovingly.

"We have enough to make us cross, I think," Dr Norman said, not heeding his little girl's caress.

"Have we? but Dr Watts says that 'we should not let our angry passions rise,' papa."

"Dr Watts was a fool," Dr Norman answered.

"Then I won't learn any more of his hymns," Miss Prissy rejoined.

Dr Norman felt hereupon bound to give his little daughter an explanation.

"Pray understand me, Prissy," he went on. "If Dr Watts had said we should not let our angry passions rise for nothing, he would have been right. But there are occasions when it is one's duty to be angry. For instance, Martin Luther was right to let his angry passion rise against the Pope."

"And Kitty is your Pope, isn't she, papa? Naughty Pope! Poor Martin Luther!"

Then the patting and caressing began again, and Dr Norman, seeing no way to enlighten Prissy's moral notions further, took refuge in his library. His experiments and lucubrations did not go on well for the next few days. The former seemed unsatisfactory, the latter uninteresting. He invited a friend or two to dinner; but the conversation lagged, to his thinking, and the dishes were ill-cooked. He accompanied Laura to a small evening party, and found the

women very dull or very frivolous. He received a flattering invitation from a learned society at Halle to read a paper there before their next assembly, coupled with a report of his speculations, and he thought what learned lumber German writing was, and what a long journey this vexatious amiability compelled him to make!

In plain English, the tidings of Kitty's approaching marriage put Dr Norman into a state of irritation which lasted for several days, and might have lasted much longer, but for a severe cold, which he caught whilst moodily studying the binary stars from the house-top one damp autumnal night.

The cold, with its attendant discomforts, kept him to his bed for a week, and effectually cured his ill-temper.

Meantime, when the first flush of her great joy had passed away, Laura's heart was full of wonder and uneasiness. Should she encounter Perry again? Did he care for her still? Would he devise some way of seeing her and speaking to her sometimes? She remembered that she was no longer a child, and that Perry's friendship for her must henceforth mean more than it had done a year ago. And in those sweet days of comradeship it had not been all over with Perry and Kitty; but Kitty was lost to Perry now, and Laura read in his bright looks and buoyant manner happy auguries for herself.

She did not grudge Kitty the early, faithful passion of that dear heart—for Kitty had been a goddess to Laura also—but she longed to recompense him for past sufferings by loving him and clinging to him till life should end.

This was sweet Laura's ambition.

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## CHAPTER LXI.

PERRY shut himself up in his studio for several days, and refused alike counsel and comfort from everybody. When night came on, he would wrap himself up in his Spanish cloak, and stalk up and down the lonely Brompton lanes, to the infinite terror of any benighted little milliner's apprentice,

or timid elderly gentleman he might encounter. Solitude, he said, was what he wanted, and he could never get half enough of it. Those who loved him now could best show it by betaking themselves out of his sight. "After Kitty's marriage, the deluge," he reiterated to Polly Cornford. "The world for me is virtually at an end. I am a ghost, I consort only with dire shapes and spirits. My nightly visions would terrify you so that your hair stood on end."

"Not they," good Polly would answer, cheerfully. "I have never been frightened in my life but once, and that was when I slipped down on the rocks at Ramsgate, and there stuck like a jelly-fish."

Perry gave vent to his feelings in painting a picture on an enormous canvas, which he said was to be his bridal gift to Kitty.

The composition was in the worst manner of Gustave Doré, and the execution perfect as scene-painting. Two Titanic figures stalked across a weird plain, bordered with apocryphal ravines, and mountains belching fire ; the heavens were black, save where a ghastly moon broke forth above the two wanderers, one of whom was fleeing from the pursuit of the other.

The pursued, it is hardly necessary to say, was Kitty—Kitty young, Kitty beautiful, but Kitty haunted and aghast with fear ; the other, who followed as her shadow, was Perry's ghost, with just as much likeness put into the face as a skeleton admitted of.

Perry exulted over this conception far more than he had ever exulted over any work before.

"Is it not a masterpiece?" he would ask of Polly again and again ; and Polly, to humour his frantic fancy, would say Yes, and stare at it and declare that it made her flesh creep.

When the picture was done Perry felt better. His frenzy passed as an ague-fit. He was again, as Polly said, "clothed, and in his right mind."

Then his thoughts reverted to Laura.

"I have sown my wild oats, Polly," he said, seriously. "Like the man who listened to the Ancient Mariner, I have become a sadder and a wiser man. Why should I not cast anchor for once and for all by marrying that sweet girl?"

"Why should you not, indeed," cried Polly, "if she would have you, and if Dr Norman approved of a scapegrace for a son-in-law?"

"An artist," said Perry, waving his hand, "is always a gentleman, and my prospects could not be better."

"Your clothes might be a trifle better," Polly said, quizzically. "At any rate, don't go a courting till you've got a new coat."

"I will order a velvet one to-morrow, and as soon as it comes home—well, we shall see what I do then."

"Froggy would a-wooing go,  
Whether his mother would let him or no,"

began Polly; and for several days, whenever Perry broached the subject of his attachment to Laura, she repeated the strain. That Perry seriously entertained the idea of proposing to Laura, she never for a moment suspected. The idea was too preposterous.

But Perry had never been more in earnest during the term of his existence. He yearned for sympathy, and had not Laura given him sympathy of the sweetest kind? He yearned for some woman's love, and was he not as sure of Laura's love, as of Kitty's indifference? In fine, he yearned to turn over a fresh page of life; and this one promised to be very fair.

Perry's genius was not baffled by such considerations as difference of social position and want of money. He consulted one of his friends, Crosbie Carrington, who promised to help him.

"I know some people who meet Dr Norman and his pretty daughter at a house in Bayswater. I'll ask them to take you, or get you invited—being a distinguished artist—and, once there, any one will introduce you to the old buffer—I mean the doctor."

Crosbie Carrington was as good as his word, and soon there came a formal invitation from the family at Bayswater to an *At Home*. Perry got himself up magnificently, thanks to a dress suit borrowed of Crosbie, and a new pair of shiny boots, and a dress shirt on which he laid out his last guinea. . Moreover he had his hair cut and his beard dressed

by a barber, and got some one to lend him a limp opera hat to carry in his hand, as the fashion of the day requires.

Perry felt considerable elation as he alighted from his Hansom cab about eleven o'clock at a well-appointed, spacious house in Porchester Terrace, and heard the big footman at the bottom of the staircase call out stentorously, "Mr Perugino Neeve!" and then the big footman at the top, as Perry afterwards jocosely related, "took up the wondrous tale;" and the mistress of the house came forward, and the master of the house came forward, and he was made much of, as, being a genius, it behoved him to be.

It was not a crowded party, and the first persons on whom Perry's eye lighted were Laura Norman and her father. Dr Norman, recognising Mrs Cornford's friend, at once held out his hand; Laura felt that she might do the same, and the three talked like old acquaintances.

"Your friends and the public have had great cause for uneasiness on your behalf," Dr Norman began; and feeling a friendliness for the frank, handsome, gifted young fellow, whom he imagined to be struggling with want and obscurity, he added one or two gracious little speeches about his last picture in the Academy.

By and by, Perry's hostess came up, wanting to introduce him to So-and-so and So-and-so; and Laura's heart bounded at the homage her hero was receiving. The mistress of the house was, in truth, a most amiable and liberal-minded lion-hunter, who did infinite service to society in general by collecting in her drawing-room not only the big lions who can roar, and show their teeth, and lash their tails, but the timid lions and the toothless lions, and the little lions who have very small tails, and don't know in the least how to lash them.

Perry, coming under the last category, was trained accordingly. His hostess had heard of Mr Neeve's great musical attainments. Would Mr Neeve play some little bagatelle or other? And, of course, Perry sat down and played one or two of Schumann's compositions, in his best, most fantastic manner, and then a delicious French melody, light and airy as a play of fountains, and his audience listened with delight.

But the young lion was to lash his tail with still greater

effect. Mrs ——, the hostess, was honoured by the presence of a Persian gentleman, an attaché of some great Mogul or other then on a mission to England, and there was no one but his interpreter to talk to him. Could Mr Neeve remember a word or two of Arabic ? Perry could remember a word or two, he said ; and lo ! there was the painter of "The Cedar Forest," and the accomplished musician, talking the language of Mahomet and the patriarchs trippingly on the tongue—gutturals, sibilations, astounding aspirated vowels, and all ! Whether Perry's Arabic would have borne more critical investigation is another matter, but he began by quoting the opening verses of the Koran, to show his proficiency to his interlocutor, and necessarily did not feel called upon to make long speeches after such a beginning.

The Persian talked. Perry asked if he were hungry ? whence he had come ? whither he was going ? if his grandmother were well ?—a punctilio of Eastern ceremonial—half a dozen other questions, and then they blessed each other in the name of the Prophet. Perry was next deputed to take a lady down to the refreshment-room, where he made an excellent little supper, and he made a second little supper on his own account, and went away intoxicated with the evening's pleasure.

True, he had only talked to Laura for five minutes, but what an auspicious introduction to good society !

"I wish you had been there, Polly," he said to poor, patient Mrs Cornford, who was sitting up to let him in and hear his report. "It was such a jolly party, and I cut as good a figure as any of my betters, I assure you."

Then he told her the whole story from beginning to end ; and Polly went to bed, feeling that if one thing in the world would recompense her for the kicks and cuffs of fortune, it was her boy's success in life. Why should not Perry marry Laura Norman ? Why should not Perry make himself a reputation in the world ? After all, Kitty's evil behaviour might prove his salvation instead of his undoing. Who should say ?

Perry rose next day, determined to strike while the iron was hot, and declare his intentions to Dr Norman whilst Dr Norman's favourable impression of him should be green.

Mrs Cornford sent proverbs and wise saws at his head, as thick and hardhitting as hailstones, in dissuasion of such a proceeding, but Perry shook them off.

"Now or never is the time for me to marry and make a man of myself," he said ; "if I once begin shilly-shallying, the end will be that I shall take to thinking about Kitty again and have no courage for anything."

"Well, wait a week."

"Not a day, not a hour," Perry said, authoritatively, and ringing the bell, cried out to Mary Hann : "Mary Hann, black my boots to the best of your juvenile ability, and then bring em to me to finish off."

As soon as he had finished his breakfast, Mr Perugino took off his coat, and worked away zealously at his boots till the desirable polish was attained. Then he dived into the little scullery, and filling the largest bucket that could be found with warm water, went up-stairs to perform his toilette.

The toilette occupied upwards of an hour, at the end of which time Mr Perugino emerged like one of the Trojan heroes whom the wand of Pallas Athene has washed, curled, perfumed, and arrayed by magic.

"My stars !" cried Polly, "I'm sure the world must be coming to an end."

"I'm sorry to say my cravats are," Perry said, dolefully. "And a dark-blue necktie would be just a point of colour in the picture !"

"I'll run to the bottom of the street and buy you one," Polly said, good-naturedly ; and, quick as lightning, she put on her bonnet and performed the errand.

When, as Perry complacently observed, the last touch had been put in, he sallied forth, Mrs Cornford singing after him—

"Froggy would a-wooing go,  
Whether his mother would let him or no ;  
Roly-poly gammon and spinach,  
Heigho ! says Roly."

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## CHAPTER LXII.

*LAURA'S SATURDAYS.*

PERRY felt as brave as a lion till he found himself in Dr Norman's library, awaiting Dr Norman. Then the sort of disagreeable suspense with which we await the dentist who is to draw out a tooth took possession of him; and, as he described to Mrs Cornford, not a nerve in his body but turned traitor to him in his hour of need; and he thought nobody had ever quaked so thoroughly—except the devil when St Dunstan held him by the nose!

Dr Norman greeted his visitor with the utmost blandness, adding—"You would not have been admitted, except that it is just lunch-time, as I am always busy till half-past one o'clock. Will you take a tête-à-tête lunch with me? My little girls are spending the day at Hampstead."

"Thank you—I am unable to stay to-day," poor Perry stammered forth; "I have an engagement."

"I suppose, like all artists, you are glad to utilise what little daylight we get at this season?" Dr Norman said, for he noticed the young man's embarrassment, and wanted to set him at ease.

"Yes," Perry answered, gathering courage; "my last picture being well thought of, I want to make hay while the sun shines, as the saying goes. I trust you have no prejudice against men of my craft, sir?"

"On the contrary," Dr Norman said, "I am proud to number artists among my acquaintances—the rising men as well as the veterans."

Perry grew bolder and bolder.

"I am delighted to hear you say so, especially as I have come to ask a great favour of you," he said, twirling his hat in his fingers—it was borrowed for the occasion—rather nervously. "I dare say you will be surprised to hear that I have conceived a sincere attachment for your daughter, Miss Laura." (If that is not a proper and polite way of putting it, thought Perry, nothing is!)

Dr Norman did not look, as young novelists say, as if a thunderbolt had dropped at his feet ; but he certainly looked amused and amazed—amused at the idea of his little Laura having a lover, and amazed at Mr Perugino, of unwashed memory, being that lover. Smiling, not unkindly, but with an underlying current of mixed humour and vexation, he said—

“My dear sir, Laura is a child.”

“She is nineteen, sir,” Perry said, with great gravity ; “and I am twenty-five. One can hardly begin a happy life too early.”

“True, true,” Dr Norman answered ; “but what do you two know of each other ? It seems to me that the question is mooted somewhat prematurely.”

“I had the happiness of seeing a good deal of Miss Laura in Paris,” Perry answered, still on his best behaviour ; “and I think we understand each other pretty well. But of course I could not speak of my wishes to her till I had heard how favourably you might be disposed towards me.”

“You have acted like a man of honour,” Dr Norman said, shaking the young man by the hand. “My poor little girl is motherless, and has no advisers but myself—more’s the pity.”

Then tears filled Dr Norman’s eyes, and he walked up and down the room in great perplexity.

He did not know in the least what to say to this new friend of Laura’s, this ardent young wooer, this promising aspirant in the field of art. Certainly, he should not have chosen a poor young artist as the husband of his child ; but in matters of love and marriage, who can choose for another ? Dr Norman had never entertained the thought of his little girls making, to use a common phrase, “a good match ;” neither had he any such ambition for his boys. What he prized in women was grace, sweetness, beauty, wisdom. What he prized in men was high purpose, integrity, eloquence, manliness. Gifts and graces were the criteria by which he appraised his fellows ; wanting these, and possessing abundance of other things, they were poor in his eyes.

He knew little enough of Perry, except that he was a genius ; that he possessed a sweet, affectionate, winning nature, one could read at first sight ; but even coupled with genius, was

this enough? Had Perry the stuff in him to get free from his early connections, to embrace a hard-working and domestic life, to avoid the moral shoals and quicksands to which a young man of genius is exposed; to be such a friend, lover, and protector as Laura needed?

On the other hand, if he and Laura loved each other truly, had he the right to forbid their intercourse? Was not Perry fairly entitled to a fair trial at his hands? Many a less worthy man than he had been shipwrecked in early life by the want of a little timely trust and kindness. Many a less promising youth had been nipped in the bud by the contempt of those whose favour was as sunshine. All these considerations passed through Dr Norman's mind in the space of a minute or two; Perry sitting by, fidgeting, changing colour, suffering from a suspense that was half real, half serio-comic.

"Could I only have bolted then," he told Polly, "never again would froggy have gone a-wooing in the space of his mortal career."

Dr Norman sat down.

"I really don't know what to say to your proposition, so greatly has it taken me by surprise," he said. "I have no right that I know of to give you a point-blank refusal; at the same time, I feel hardly justified in giving my immediate consent. May I ask a question which, under the circumstances, is hardly indelicate?"

"Certainly," poor Perry said, colouring to the brow. He expected some allusion to Kitty.

"Have you sufficient means to support a wife—whose sole portion would be a modest allowance out of my own income?"

"I have only what I earn, sir," answered Perry, with great dignity.

"I should be sorry to see my child married to a man who despised work or workers," Dr Norman said, "but do you earn enough and to spare for your own wants. A man who marries a comparatively portionless girl should first ask himself that question."

"I have no doubt that I could do so—had I any sufficient motive," Perry said. "A fellow loses courage when it concerns nobody else whether he works well or ill."

"True," Dr Norman said, very seriously; and for some minutes he was again silent. Then he hesitatingly asked Perry another question. "Could you withdraw yourself from the companions and associations among which Laura found herself in Paris when under Mrs Cornford's roof? I have nothing whatever to say against them or Mrs. Cornford, whom I esteem from the bottom of my heart—except that it is not the kind of society I should select for my child."

"I would do anything in the world you like," poor Perry said, dying to end the interview.

"Well," Dr Norman answered, in a more cheerful tone, "you shall be at liberty to come to my house, and renew your acquaintance with Laura. Can I say more than this?"

"Oh no," Perry said. "Indeed you couldn't possibly say more, and you're a"—he was going to say—a brick—but checked himself in time, and added—"and you're a kind friend to me, sir, indeed!"

Dr Norman rose and gave Perry his hand. Perry started up like one electrified, so pleased was he at the prospect of a dismissal, and the two shook hands cordially.

"Laura and I receive our friends on Saturday evenings, from eight o'clock till eleven," Dr Norman said. "On these occasions you will always be welcome. I need hardly ask of you a complete reticence on the subject of your wishes for the present."

"I will be as circumspect as possible," Perry said; and after a word or two more, he contrived to get away.

"I hope I have not been rash," was Dr Norman's soliloquy, as soon as he found himself alone. "The young man seems modest and sincere, and is undoubtedly gifted in a surpassing degree. Why should he not do well? And I could hardly forbid him my house when he is made welcome at the houses of my intimate friends."

"I'm in for it," Perry cried, throwing himself at full length on Mrs Cornford's little sofa. "I'm in for being respectable all the rest of my life! Laura is an angel, and I look upon myself as the happiest fellow under the sun; but O Polly, my good soul, give me a drink of water, for the African fever was not half so bad to encounter as Dr Norman!"

But Perry determined to persevere. Every Saturday, after an hour's toilette, he emerged, curled, perfumed, and trim as Odysseus from the transforming wand of Athene. At a quarter-past eight precisely he entered Laura's little drawing-room, hat in hand, gloved, and looking as much as possible like a Parisian dandy in a drawing-room comedy at the Variétés. Dr Norman had simply said to Laura, on the first Saturday after Perry's interview with him—

"Laura, perhaps Mr Perugino Neeve may call this evening. If so, let us have a little music."

And Laura had coloured to the brow, and her sweet, shy eyes had looked so exultant at the news, that Dr Norman saw at a glance how matters stood with his little girl's heart.

That first evening, Laura put on a blue dress, bright as a bit of April sky, and bound her fair hair with a little gold fillet; and what with this enchanting dress, and the pea-blossom hue of her cheeks, and the grateful look of happiness filling her sweet eyes, she looked as dainty a little damsel as ever delighted a lover's sight.

Hitherto, these Saturdays had been somewhat a heavy undertaking to the poor child, who was at present only beginning to know her father's guests. But Perry's appearance altered the entire aspect of things. The weeks were all golden now, because each contained a Saturday, and Saturday was happiness. Perry behaved in a manner wholly irreproachable, and he confessed to Polly Cornford that he marvelled at himself. He behaved to Laura so circumspectly as to inspire Dr Norman with confidence. He uttered no inadmissible slang. His appearance was irreproachable. He played superbly to amuse the company, and his hands had evidently been washed within recent memory.

It must be confessed that, up to this period, Perry's conversion was wholly that of the inner man. At home, he worked as fitfully, and smoked as persistently as ever; sat up till past midnight playing dominoes and drinking beer with Crosbie Carrington and other friends, or playing billiards at the "Fulham Arms;" descended to his studio at mid-day, unwashed, unkempt, and in his shirt-sleeves, to paint for an hour or two,

or perhaps to compose a waltz for Laura's next reception, or very often to read a greasy novel of Dickens or Paul de Kock, hired from the library at a penny a volume per diem.

Mrs Cornford might coax or entreat, or declare that she would go and tell Dr Norman what sort of son-in-law he was going to have—Perry only laughed or chided in his patronising spoiled-child way, and made answer—

"All in good time, Polly. As soon as I am married, no fabricator of pictures for the London market shall work harder than I."

"When the sky falls we shall catch larks," Mrs Cornford would retort; "and when parrots leave off prating they'll catch mice like owls. Oh! I know you."

"I am such a poor creature, just because of your disbelief," Perry said. "When I have got a trusting little wife by my side, I shall become a second Turner."

"You are clever enough to become anything you choose. But what have you done since coming back, pray, Mr Harum-scarum?"

"I have been too brimful of impressions," Perry said, grandly. "The flash of inspiration, like molten gold, must cool ere it takes the form of sovereigns."

And Dr Norman would sometimes say—"And your pictures, Mr Perugino?" The doctor preferred his young friend's Christian name, tickled by the artistic and sonorous sound of it.

"Oh! I work like a slave," Perry would reply; "but the daylight is so short, that by the end of a week I have done nothing."

He generally carried a sketch-book or portfolio with him to the Addison Road, and delighted Prissy beyond measure by illustrating a chapter of Robinson Crusoe for her especial benefit. But anything like a finished work never appeared.

Dr Norman's friends were sufficiently versed in art to distinguish genius from mechanism, and declared Perry to be a genius of the first water. Moreover, the young man's simple, happy, impulsive way of doing things, and almost childish enjoyment of unexpected trifles, and his anxiety to please others, won every heart. Circumstances, therefore, favoured Perry's

suit; and one day Dr Norman called Laura to him, and said very kindly—a mother could hardly have been more kind—

"I think, Laura, we all know why Mr Perugino is so fond of coming here by this time. Shall I say that my little Laura likes to have him for her friend?—or send him away?"

And Laura, whose conscience smote her for having given her best friendship to Perry long ago, and for having tried to understand her father less than a daughter should, took his hand to her lips and shed tears over it, crying—

"O papa! I have not been good to you; and you—you are an angel to me!"

### CHAPTER LXIII.

*"A DREADFUL DOOR IN HER SOUL STOOD WIDE."*

KITTY and Sir George remained masters of the field. The marriage was accepted past question. The wedding preparations had been put in hand. In a fortnight's time Kitty would become Lady Bartelotte.

Ella was not the person to make any sort of sacrifice with a bad grace, and she did her best, by every possible act of consideration and generosity, to atone for her past opposition. She lectured Sir George severely on one or two shabby little proposals that he happened to make in her hearing; and to her intervention poor Kitty owed a far more liberal trousseau than in her most ambitious moments she had ever dreamed of. Then Ella talked to Kitty as any practical person double Kitty's age might have done, on the necessity of holding her own, and keeping her husband in his proper place, not by covert blandishments, but by rational candour.

"Dear papa and I would have been wretched if we had made a compact never to contradict each other," she said; "and I am quite sure, Kitty, that you will be ten times happier if you begin by treating papa quite frankly, and saying what you like or dislike."

"You forget," Kitty said, very humbly, "that I am not Sir George's daughter, but a penniless—in some senses—a friendless girl, whom he condescends to marry."

"Nonsense! When a man marries a woman, he makes her his equal; though," Ella added, with a touch of humour, "I think in this case, dear Kitty, that the condescension is wholly on your side."

And much more Ella said to the same purpose; and Kitty listened, promising this, assenting to that, ready to do anything and everything, out of the fulness of her gratitude.

She was enjoying a little interval of repose that was inexpressibly welcome and dear. Behind lay the past—the past of unrest, and struggle, and ambition; before lay the future, for which she had toiled and span, and she trusted it, and went on her way rejoicing.

There were trifles that made her cheeks glow with pleasure, such as wedding gifts, little notes of friendly recognition from Ella's cousins, invitations from some of Sir George's friends in England; one—O happiness!—signed by an earl's daughter—and other things of the kind recurring daily. These small triumphs astounded and dazzled poor Kitty beyond measure. What had she done to deserve such signal good fortune?

One evening she sat in her room, lost in the contemplation of her treasures, moral and material, and enjoying a rare feast of solitude. Sir George had become a much more exacting lover of late, reasoning thus—"If my chivalry leads me so far as to marry this girl, surely she has a right to reward me accordingly?" Kitty must always be walking with him, reading to him, writing for him, and flattering him, or he grew irritable and jealous. A little solitude was therefore a rare feast, and on this particular occasion Kitty felt disposed to enjoy it like an epicure. She walked to the wardrobe, and opening the door, contemplated her new dresses one by one. There was a velvet dress, a satin dress, and a lace dress, all new treasures, and a white dress for her wedding, and other delightful things, owed to Ella's generosity. Then she opened her drawers, and handled delicate laces and cashmere morning-gowns, and embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs—all Ella's gifts. Lastly, she took up her jewel-case, and putting it on her lap, smiled the smile of a joyful child.

Kitty's belongings were certainly nothing extraordinary, and

by no means exceeded those of any gentlewoman of ordinary means. But then she had been a draggle-tailed Cinderella, a beggar's daughter only two or three years ago, and she felt herself by comparison transformed into a fairy princess, a King Cophetua's bride! She turned over her trinkets one by one. There were Myra's gifts—the trinkets she had worn in Paradise Place had been discarded long ago—the gold brooch of Trichinopoly work, which had marked the beginning of their friendship, the bracelets, the rings, and other gifts. How rich she had once felt herself in the possession of these! And what were they in comparison to later acquisitions? There was the pearl necklace, Ella's gift, and the opal and diamond ring, Sir George's pledge of betrothal, and an old-fashioned but handsome diamond agrafe, the wedding gift of Sir George's sister; and last of all, her crowning pride and delight, a case of jewels which had belonged to Sir George's mother, and which Ella declared to be Kitty's beyond all question now.

Kitty sat amid her wealth, a bewitched and bewildered thing. Was life in truth a reality or a dream, and should she wake up one morning to find her treasure spent, lost, visionary as fairy-gold? She felt so rich that she could hardly help doubting in her riches now and then.

As she was thinking these thoughts, Françine tapped lightly, and entered with letters. Letters were pleasant things to Kitty now, since they generally contained congratulations, or gracious little nothings from some of Ella's kin, and she took them eagerly. The first was a somewhat pompous but kindly-meant note from one of these future relatives of Kitty, which she read with a smile of contentment. The other was from Polly Cornford, and brimful, as Polly Cornford's letters were sure to be, of slang, good-natured scoldings, wise saws and comments. Polly wrote to congratulate her runaway upon her approaching marriage; and Kitty read on, thinking what a kind and forbearing letter it was, and how unselfish a slangy, slatternly, outspoken creature like Polly could be.

Polly, in truth, spite of her radical discontent with Kitty's conduct, could not help feeling and expressing a certain amount of pleasure at her good fortune. Polly loved Perry

with all her heart, but she saw exactly how much his inconsequent behaviour was to be charged to Kitty's so-called treachery ; and when the vials of her wrath were once spent upon the traitor, a little worldly-wise congratulation was evidently lurking behind. Polly Cornford was far from being a proper-minded person, giving just an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. From her the devil always got his due, and a little more. But the gist of her letter lay in a postscript. And this is how the postscript ran :—

“ P.S.—You 'll be glad to hear that Perry is not the fool he was. The Lord be praised for it ! He is engaged to marry Laura Norman, with her daddy's consent, and will beat his betters yet. My blessing on you both; and to you, my lady, gilt gingerbread without end, and an appetite accordingly.”

Kitty started from her seat, and held Polly's letter to the lamp with trembling hands and dilated eyes. Yes, the words were as plainly written as it was possible to be. *He is engaged to marry Laura Norman !*

She dashed the letter aside, took it up and tore it asunder, then matched the fragments, and read for a third, a fourth, nay, a fifth time—*He is engaged to marry Laura Norman !*

She crushed the letter in her hands with fresh passion, and kneeling before the fire, thrust it between the bars. When it had burned away she unlocked a drawer, and took out a little silk bundle. It will be remembered that during the first weeks of Kitty's stay at Shelley House, Perry had gone down to see her. Terribly frightened lest his ragamuffinly appearance should scandalise so proper a young lady as herself, she brushed his coat, and taking up a pair of scissors, clipped an inch or two of that long curly hair that Perry never willingly trimmed. It will be remembered that the operation was hardly over when Regy entered, and, quick as lightning, locks and scissors were thrust in Miss Kitty's apron pocket.

Kitty had often laughed at herself and chided herself for keeping such a souvenir of her old lover ; but whenever her trunks were turned out, on arrival or departure, the little silk bundle had hitherto found a corner. She used to think that some day or other the bright curls of hair should be put in a

locket and occasionally worn. And if the temptation had come to destroy them, they always looked so soft and bright, and reminded her so forcibly of Perry, that she hesitated. But now, why should she keep Perry's locks any longer? He no longer claimed pity or tenderness at her hands. He had engaged himself to Laura Norman. As much jealousy, madness, hatred, call it what you will, as a woman feels whose lover forsakes her, Kitty felt now, because her forsaken lover had found consolation.

She opened the little silk bundle with quick, angry fingers, and turned the mass of gold-brown locks into her lap. Then, gathering up her apron, she would have emptied its contents into the fire, but something seemed to hold her back. She sat down, glanced round at her velvets and silks, at the treasures of her jewel-case displayed on the table, at the betrothal ring on her finger, and sighed, and was fain to weep, if tears would only come? Perry, then, cared for her no longer! Was there indeed no such thing as truth in the world? Was Sir George's affection the most worth having? If so, she had chosen the right casket after all. But a voice spoke from her heart on Perry's behalf. How had she requited his devotion? What had she done to make him happy? Was he not justly rewarded by Laura's love? Was she not justly punished by his indifference. She took up the soft, bright locks, kissed them, pressed them to her heart, rocking herself to and fro, in a passion of grief, anger, desolation. At last she said, half aloud, as if Perry's spirit were near, and she were praying to it, "O Perry, I do love you!—I do!—I do!"

The sound of her own voice, so pitiful, so solitary, so penitent as it was, brought tears; and on her knees—she knew not to whom she was praying, if indeed the act could be called a prayer at all—she cried abundantly, and called on Perry's name, and begged for forgiveness. In that brief conflict, half-retrospection and half-prophecy, "a dreadful door in her soul stood wide," as William Allingham's poem runs.

She saw wherein she differed from those whose goodness she now envied for the first time. She knew that she should rise up on the morrow and live and move and act as the Kitty of

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old, and enjoy the life she had chosen, in spite of such retributive thoughts as would come now and then.

But to-day Perry's image took complete possession of her. For his sake she would fain have had many acts of the past revocable. So strongly was she suffering with him, and by reason of him now, that had a straight short path led to his abiding-place, she would perhaps have taken it, and fled from her triumphs!

"Poor Perry!" she said to herself again and again, recalling his looks and words with fresh bursts of tears, as one recalls looks and words of the dead. How fond he had once been of her! Did he really love Laura Norman, or was his engagement the mere consequence of his desponding and loneliness? She knew not what she thought, or what she wished to think; and when at last she went to bed, it was to dream of the old life and the old love, before she had tasted ambition and Perry had battled with despair.

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## CHAPTER LXIV.

### *THE BELGRAVIAN WEDDING.*

SIR GEORGE was determined to do everything on as economical a scale as circumstances admitted; and so absorbed did he seem in this matter, that one would have thought the saving of a few shillings of infinitely more importance to him than the securing a young bride. The marriage was to take place, with the utmost privacy, at the Consulate. Poor Kitty must forego the train of bridesmaids, the bridal banquet, and other ceremonials that fashion has ordained; and so strictly practical was her last and most favoured lover, that he even forbade himself the cost of a new coat in honour of the occasion. Custom has always prescribed a honeymoon, but a honeymoon may be long or short, simple or costly, according to circumstances and inclination. Sir George ordained that their honeymoon should be very simple indeed.

"We have outlived our juvenile follies, have we not?" he would say to Kitty; as if the fact of their engagement

equalised them in age as well as other things ; and poor Kitty confessed to have outlived her juvenile follies. So they were to go to Gibraltar for a month, and take up their abode in a house lent them by a friend of Sir George's. "If not too expensive, we will visit Cadiz and Ronda," Sir George had said ; and Kitty sincerely hoped that it might not be too expensive, thinking how dull they should find a month to themselves at Gibraltar. Ella was to remain, meantime, at Malaga with the Gardiners ; and when the spring should have fairly set in, the little party intended to return homeward. Nothing, therefore, could have been more prosaic than Kitty's wedding. It was not a gloomy wedding, thanks to Ella's intervention. There was a pretty little breakfast, adorned with costly flowers. The Gardiners came, and Mr Tyrrell, acting the part of Sir George's groomsman, and another friend ; all of whom brought flowers and gifts for the bride, which they presented with pretty speeches. Ella exerted herself to the utmost, and was cheerful, if not gay, and affectionate as of old to her friend. The servants had been presented with new clothes, and little Francine was in tears of delight at miladi's splendour. The wedding was simply prosaic, as any wedding must have been with such a bridegroom.

"My dear Kitty," Sir George said, as they sat down to breakfast, "do gather up your dress a little. Don't you see how the servants keep treading on it ?"

Then he turned to Lady Gardiner, who was sitting next him, and added, smiling—

"It is high time that this young lady had some one to look after her, you see."

All this was harmless and well meant, but, coupled with a dozen remarks of the same kind, fidgeted the others, and took the bloom off the occasion. When the adieux were being made, and Mr Tyrrell waited at the door to hand Kitty into the carriage, Sir George cried out in a shrill key, "My dear, we must take our old cotton umbrellas with us. The idea of mountaineering without cotton umbrellas ! Francine, cherchez les ombrelles de coton."

And Francine, who was to accompany her mistress, rushed

hither and thither, and Matthew, the man-servant, helped her. The old cotton umbrellas were not to be found—the women-servants having hidden them away, in honour of the wedding. There was no alternative but to go without them, and Kitty felt thankful to be fairly off.

"We'll buy some good stout cheap umbrellas as soon as ever we get to Gibraltar," were Sir George's first words; "but, really, the culpable negligence of those servants is quite terrible. They have no sort of respect for property whatever."

"Shabby property," Kitty said, smiling.

"Exactly; of all snobs under the sun, the worst are footmen and ladies'-maids. There's one comfort, you are a sensible woman, and have been used to simple ways of living; so we can do with the least possible number of them. Is it necessary to keep Francine—Ella's maid could surely wait on you both?"

Kitty smiled at this, and laid one little hand on Sir George's arm, and scolded him playfully.

"Of course I wish you to have everything becoming your position," he answered. "I'm sure if ever a man was ready to make a fool of himself for a woman, I am for you—ah! here we are at the harbour. And there's the yacht all ready. How pleasant it is to have a yacht lent one!"

The day was superb. The sky was a canopy of soft purple; the sea smooth as a lake in summer-time; the distant mountains, of loveliest shape and colour.

In honour of the bride and bridegroom, the little yacht hoisted colours, a crimson carpet was laid down on deck, and an awning of the same colour put up. Garlands of flowers hung from the main-yard. The sailors wore gala dress and white rosettes, and a little negro boy presented Kitty with a bouquet as she stepped on board.

Kitty's cheeks flushed with pleasure at this reception, and Sir George was evidently much gratified, though, as he whispered to his bride, "he should be compelled to give a pretty penny in drink-money to the men, which was a drawback."

On the whole he liked it. Certainly a bridal trip could hardly have been more auspicious or poetic. The *Undine* was a delightful little craft, and skimmed the waves grace-

fully as a bird. Dainty little fishing-boats, with sails shaped like butterflies' wings, kept her company. Her path lay along a bright blue sea, in sight of hills brighter and bluer still. There was enough solitude to inspire dreams, and yet not enough to inspire melancholy. But Kitty's bridal trip was utterly un-poetic. Sir George could not have been kinder, and more cheerful ; he could not have exerted himself more assiduously to amuse her. He had simply nothing poetic in his nature.

"I don't think I ever felt in better humour," he said, as they paced the deck arm-in-arm. "I suppose nothing puts a man in a better humour with himself and the world in general than acting up to his convictions. Now, I'm not a selfish man by disposition ; but, of course, at first sight, it did seem that to marry you would be a little imprudent, especially on dear Ella's account."

"Ella has behaved beautifully," Kitty said.

"She has indeed—the darling ! But I hope and trust that she will have her reward. There was no other way to keep the property together except for me to marry, and it is greatly to Ella's interest that the property should be kept together. You have so much good sense," he added, "that I don't mind dwelling on the practical side of things, though you know well enough that I should never have dreamed of marrying again, had I not been over head and ears in love."

Kitty smiled, too much accustomed to Sir George's good-natured self-glorification to take any fresh outburst of it amiss ; and he went on—

"And you shall not repent of the step you have taken. I am nearly fifty, it is true, and you are barely half as old ; but a girl is often happier for marrying a man of experience, whom she can look up to ; I certainly do not look my age ?"

"Oh no !"

"How was it," he continued, "that you were not married long ago ? A handsome, high-spirited girl like yourself must have had lovers, no matter how much you might lack other good things of this world."

Kitty blushed, and confessed that she had not been without lovers.

"And you liked me the best ! Was that it ?" he said, patting the little hand that rested on his arm.

"I suppose so," Kitty answered, with a little laugh. Sir George's queer, self-satisfied love-making struck her, perchance, as a comical surprise now and then.

"Well, under the circumstances, I commend your taste. But didn't I hear something from Ella, and from your friend Mrs Wingfield, about Dr Norman's fancy for you ?"

Kitty confessed that Dr Norman was fain to make her his wife.

"I must say I wonder that you refused him. He's a deucedly good-looking fellow, and a good fellow, I should say, though he was particularly unpleasant to me."

"The best people become unpleasant when they are jealous," said Kitty, artfully ; and then she led the conversation into other channels. Somehow she could not talk of her lovers to the man who was her husband.

When Sir George went aft to smoke a cigar with the captain, Kitty began thinking. She had been inclined just now to compare Sir George to Dr Norman, to the disparagement of the former, saying to herself—"Look on this picture and on that !" but she checked the thought with sudden shame. Putting comparisons aside, how straightforward and sincere had Sir George's behaviour been to her all along ! It was not his fault if he lacked Dr Norman's intellectual strength and nobility of character ; it was not his fault if he lacked Dr Norman's pleasant looks and dignified carriage. Sir George had wooed and won her in perfect good faith ; pretending to no gifts and graces that he did not possess, never seeking to shield his faults or shortcomings from her observation ; never assuming virtues that he lacked, or promising more than he could perform.

He had married her simply because he loved and admired her. By such a marriage he gained no worldly advantages, and sacrificed some ; he was as good to her as it was in his nature to be.

And her own conduct ?

She confessed that it would not bear such close scrutiny as his. It was a comforting thought that he trusted her so entirely, and had no idea of any conscious self-sacrifice in her

part of the compact. He knew little of her outward history, nothing of her inner existence; and he would never know. She had written new chronicles over those dear pages of her old life inscribed with Perry's and Dr Norman's name—the first a poem, the second a scripture; and if at times a tear fell over the palimpsest, no prying eyes should see her weep.

How far off and distant the old life and the old loves seemed to her now! She had never before looked upon them as vanished beyond recall; but now, by her marriage, they had become so without a doubt. Well, the last would suffer no more at her hands; and the first had been embittered by the consciousness of wrong! And she should rest on her oars at last.

What must occupy her mind now was the duty she owed to Sir George, by whom rest, ease, and contentment—as she thought—had come. She determined to make his life happier if she could, and to be to him in all things a true and loving wife. He came up to her, all smiles and good-humour, accompanied by the captain, who was desirous of paying his respects to Lady Bartelotte. Kitty found him a delightful person, and forgot all painful retrospection for a time in the sensation of her newly-acquired dignity.

Yes, it was certainly pleasant to be Lady Bartelotte. She thought she had chosen the right casket.

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## CHAPTER LXV.

HAVING obtained Dr Norman's consent to his suit, Perry could not rest till he had mooted the subject of marriage. There was no sort of moderation in the young man's character; and the more easily did he obtain his inch, the more fractiously did he demand his ell. He was, as he said, growing a little tired of shams;—"and soap and water," Mrs Cornford would put in wickedly. Whereupon Perry declared that he liked soap and water well enough when not forced upon him, especially in cold weather.

"Well, well," rejoined Polly, "marry as soon as you can, if

you can't marry as soon as you like. But you know that the devil's in an empty purse, and I fear that's the condition of yours."

Perry hit on a scheme. He sold the picture which had been intended to awaken terrors in Kitty's guilty mind to a strolling-player—who exhibited it in the provinces as *The Avenged Lover*. He cleared out his studio of every marketable sketch and study he could well spare, and as much *bric-à-brac* as he could bring his mind to part with. He sold his Spanish cloak, his Arab horse-trappings, his least valuable photographs and engravings. He borrowed a hundred pounds on his half-finished Academy picture. Then he seized Dr Norman by the button one Saturday evening and spoke out. He had a little money, he said, with which to furnish a house. Laura's requirements were as modest as his own. Surely Dr Norman could now say nothing against the marriage?

Dr Norman knew not how to resist the young man's pleading; and Perry, having forced in the thin end of the wedge, by a well-directed tap or two, secured it firmly.

He had seen the announcement of Kitty's marriage to Sir George Bartelotte in the newspaper, and if the iron did not enter into his soul, something very much akin to malice took possession of his heart. Poor Perry was by nature as harmless a being as Heaven had ever created; but would not an angel have resented Kitty's conduct? His first impulse, therefore, was a pure, unalloyed, childish feeling of spitefulness.

Kitty had trodden upon him as if he had been a worm. He would show her, forthwith, that there were poorer creatures than he in the world, and that others held in esteem the abject thing she despised. So, for once in his life he painted zealously; and the result was the completion of his Academy picture.

Before the paint was fairly dry, he sent out Mary Hann for a cab, and drove off with his picture to the Addison Road in triumph.

"If that does not bring the doctor round," he said to Polly Cornford, "nothing will;" and Polly said she thought it would bring the doctor round.

"Please forgive my untidy appearance," Perry said to Dr

Norman ; "I was too anxious to have your opinion and Laura's of my picture, to think of anything else."

And the picture was advantageously placed in Laura's little drawing-room, and warm and hearty were the acclamations of his critics. It was a delightful picture ; not perfect by any means, for Perry was as yet too impatient to do anything perfectly ; but it was delightful in the sense of being informed with fresh, untired, passionate genius. Dr Norman's faith in Perry—which had been a little shaken of late by the undue earnestness the young man threw into the most trifling things—now rose.

"It is a good picture ; and I congratulate you, Mr Peru-gino," he said ; "with your gifts, you ought to rise to a very high position in your art."

"Such is my ambition, sir," Perry answered.

Then, finding himself alone with his future father-in-law, he added, with great gravity—"But a man is sure to lag behind others so long as he remains a bachelor."

And he replied to all Dr Norman's arguments with such winning sophisms, and Dr Norman remembered his own early marriage with so much tenderness, that at last his scruples gave way.

"I have told you all along," he said, "that my child has no portion."

"Oh, sir, as if I expected that"—

"But you might reasonably have expected it, had things gone well with me. All, however, that lies in my power to do will I do most gladly. You and Laura will naturally begin housekeeping on a small scale"—

"I am sure we should be happy in a two-pair back in Seven Dials," Perry said, with fervour.

"I don't agree with you there. But I will allow Laura a hundred a year, and a little money to help to furnish a house, and you must do the rest."

Perry was in raptures.

"I trust, when you commit yourself to Laura's keeping, that she will take care of your health," the doctor added kindly. "I fear you have been shutting yourself up too much of late."

Perry confessed that he had been imprudent for the last

fortnight, but promised to be more careful in future, and made a secret vow to think twice before encountering Laura's father in broad daylight. The truth of the matter was that his present life was a feverish one. He led a dual existence—loving Laura with his better self, hating Kitty with his worst; and naturally the unhealthy moral diet disagreed with him. And—must it be confessed?—our poor Perry differed sadly from ordinary heroes of fiction in the matter of sinews and muscular perfection. Gifted and graceful as he was, he possessed neither lofty stature, nor Herculean strength, nor muscles of iron; and as his habits were sedentary and unwholesome in the extreme, he did not acquire what Nature had failed to bestow. He returned to Polly in a state of exultation bordering on frenzy.

"Kitty couldn't marry me because I was a poor devil," he cried; "and I'm good enough for sweet Laura Norman, who has a hundred a year! Give me a slip of paper, Polly, and I'll write out the announcement of our wedding for the *Times*, for Lady Bartelotte to see."

"The doctor is willing, then?" asked Polly.

"My dear Polly, Dr Norman is a brick—God bless him! And look ye, Polly, he's going to furnish a house for us, so I can pay you the fifty pounds you lent me ages ago—in the glacial period."

"Hoity-toity-toity-tum!" said Polly. "I'm sure the world must be coming to an end when you begin to pay your debts."

Perry had seated himself at the table, and began to write—

"At the parish church of Kensington, on the —th inst., Perugino Neeve, Esquire"—

"Son of the late Perugino Neeve, Esquire, H.M.W.P.," put in Mrs Cornford, "which means Walking Poster to Her Majesty's Theatre. Never be ashamed of thy father, or of his trade, Perugino."

"—At the parish church of Kensington," repeated Perry, impatiently, "on the —th inst., Perugino Neeve, Esq.—O Polly, if I had only a handle to my name!"

"Well, you have taken the degree of A.S.S., I'm sure—put that."

Perry went on very gravely—"What about the address?"

"Put Montgomery Lodge, or The Cedars, or something equally fine," Polly said ; "for if you live in a seven-roomed house now-a-days, it is sure to have a name fit for a mansion."

"I'll leave out the address for the present, and go on—'Perugino Neeve, Esq., to Laura, eldest daughter of Edward Norman, LL.D., F.R.S., &c., &c., of Shelley House, Kent, and Muir Cottage, Kensington.' What will Lady Bartelotte say to that, I wonder ?"

"As if it mattered to you ? You're mighty lucky to get such a wife and such a father-in-law, and shouldn't trouble your head any more about Kitty than if you had never seen her."

"That is true, Polly," Perry said, seriously, and straightway he threw the announcement of his marriage in the fire.

Meantime, Laura was preparing for her new home as joyfully and shyly as a young bird that is enticed away from the parental nest.

"I don't deserve you in the least," Perry said to her, "but I will work like a slave for you."

"As if I wanted you to do that !" Laura made answer, her blue eyes shining with happiness.

"But I shall do it ; I mean to get rich for your sake, though I know we should be happy in the dingiest alley in the Isle of Dogs."

Thus Perry talked and Laura listened, assenting to everything, believing in everything ; and for the first time Mr Perugino woke up to find himself an oracle !

He had once proposed to Dr Norman that they should spend the first year or two of their married life in Italy ; but to this Dr Norman firmly objected. He would do everything, he said, to promote Perry's wishes by and by ; it was surely not unreasonable that he should like to have his young daughter near him for a little while longer.

So a tiny house was selected, overlooking the gardens of old Campden House, which Laura and Prissy proceeded to furnish with the three hundred pounds Dr Norman had given for the purpose. For a time Perry was in his element painting cornices, hanging pictures and brackets, doing, in

fact, the work of carpenter and artistic decorator to perfection. He conveyed all his prettiest treasures to his new home ; and what with Dr Norman's money, and Perry's good taste, Laura's little drawing-room was as charming as any young artist's wife could desire. One obstacle Perry had to overcome. The house was small, and had no good-sized room with a north light. He should be obliged to paint all his large subjects in the old studio at Polly Cornford's for the present. Dr Norman demurred, and Laura looked greatly vexed ; but at last the matter was happily settled in this way : Dr Norman promised to buy the house as soon as he could afford it, and Perry was bound over to build a studio for himself.

Was ever a wedding in reality anything but dismal ? Dr Norman did not know till the time came what it would cost him to lose his little girl ; and Laura's gentle heart was full of bitter self-reproach, thinking of the little she had done to make him happy, and of the wonderful undeserved happiness that he had bestowed upon her. Perry, perhaps, suffered more from inward struggle than any, since it was the first time in his life that he stood pledged to a duty. He kept saying to himself—I can make Laura happy, and I will do so, though all that was best in me I gave to Kitty long ago. But he felt ashamed and sorrowful at not being made quite happy by Laura's pure adoring love. When they started for their wedding trip to Cornwall, the two other guests took their leave, and Dr Norman and Prissy were left alone.

Miss Prissy was full of the wedding. Had papa noticed what an ugly man the clergyman was, and how he stumbled at the name Perugino ? Dr Norman had not noticed.

Well, had papa noticed what a big coat Perry wore, and, oh ! so creased ? (Perry's new coat was not forthcoming in time, so he was married in one of his friend Carrington's.)

No, Dr Norman had not noticed that either.

"O, papa ! where could your eyes have been ? But you must have heard the pew-opener whisper to the old woman next her—'My ! isn't she a bonnie one ?' meaning Laura ? and the old woman answered—'He licks her !' meaning, I suppose, papa, that Perry was the handsomest."

equalised them in age as well as other things ; and poor Kitty confessed to have outlived her juvenile follies. So they were to go to Gibraltar for a month, and take up their abode in a house lent them by a friend of Sir George's. "If not too expensive, we will visit Cadiz and Ronda," Sir George had said ; and Kitty sincerely hoped that it might not be too expensive, thinking how dull they should find a month to themselves at Gibraltar. Ella was to remain, meantime, at Malaga with the Gardiners ; and when the spring should have fairly set in, the little party intended to return homeward. Nothing, therefore, could have been more prosaic than Kitty's wedding. It was not a gloomy wedding, thanks to Ella's intervention. There was a pretty little breakfast, adorned with costly flowers. The Gardiners came, and Mr Tyrrell, acting the part of Sir George's groomsman, and another friend ; all of whom brought flowers and gifts for the bride, which they presented with pretty speeches. Ella exerted herself to the utmost, and was cheerful, if not gay, and affectionate as of old to her friend. The servants had been presented with new clothes, and little Francine was in tears of delight at miladi's splendour. The wedding was simply prosaic, as any wedding must have been with such a bridegroom.

"My dear Kitty," Sir George said, as they sat down to breakfast, "do gather up your dress a little. Don't you see how the servants keep treading on it ?"

Then he turned to Lady Gardiner, who was sitting next him, and added, smiling—

"It is high time that this young lady had some one to look after her, you see."

All this was harmless and well meant, but, coupled with a dozen remarks of the same kind, fidgeted the others, and took the bloom off the occasion. When the adieux were being made, and Mr Tyrrell waited at the door to hand Kitty into the carriage, Sir George cried out in a shrill key, "My dear, we must take our old cotton umbrellas with us. The idea of mountaineering without cotton umbrellas ! Francine, cherchez les ombrelles de coton."

And Francine, who was to accompany her mistress, rushed

had her conduct been, how candid, how loving ! There was nothing they would not do by way of rewarding her. Sir George took a solemn resolution never to thwart her wishes again. Kitty proclaimed herself Ella's debtor as long as they both should live.

One thing struck Kitty.

Why was it that they should both recognise the necessity of insisting upon this devotion to Ella ? She did not doubt them. She did not ask more affection at their hands than they were wont to give. She forgave them for the temporary suffering they had caused her.

Could it be that this marriage was already looming between father and daughter, friend and friend ? Kitty's moral perception was as acute as her practical morality was lax. The thought that Ella, whom she had loved next to Perry better than anything in the world, should lose one iota of her father's affection through her, was intolerable. That she and Ella should ever become other than the firm friends they were, was hardly less so.

She longed impatiently to be with Ella again, and assure herself that all was well. Ella's letters were loving as ever, and quite gay ; but even the most truthful people will at times write happier letters than circumstances warrant.

" Dear Ella writes word that we must soon go back," she said one morning to Sir George. " What do you say, dear ? "

Happy, happy Sir George ! to have Kitty by his side always, accosting him in this loving, wife-like strain—Kitty to rejoice his eyes all day long—Kitty trying to please him whether he were moodish or content, grave or gay. What would not some others have given for the priceless boon he took much as a matter of course ?

He was reading his letters when Kitty spoke to him, and finished a long sentence before looking up.

" You said something, I think, my dear ? " he said.

" Ella says she must have us back again soon, or " —

" Read what she says," Sir George answered.

Kitty read the following—

" You must come back again very soon. We have done our

best to amuse ourselves, but miss you both all the same. The Gardiners take the greatest care of me"—

"I'll be bound she has invited the whole family to stay with her. A pretty expense!" growled the baronet. "But go on."

"And Mr Tyrrell is delightful"—

"Do you know what I have thought for some time past?" Sir George cried, looking lively on a sudden,—"Tyrrell is in love with Ella."

"But Ella will never marry," Kitty said; "she has said so a hundred times."

"Young ladies don't marry till they're asked by somebody they find delightful," Sir George answered, with a chuckle of satisfaction at having been himself found delightful. "And Tyrrell has five or six thousand a-year. Ella might do worse."

"Do you wish Ella to marry?" Kitty asked, opening her large eyes.

"I never have wished it before, nor do I now, except for her own sake. It was in the nature of things that my marriage should make me wish it. But read a little more. I am amused."

Kitty continued to read Ella's letter:—

"Mr Tyrrell is delightful, and not a day passes but we are indebted to him for some pleasant surprise in the shape of new excursions, new music, new sketches, or new books. I do think, Kitty, that this versatility is on the surface only, and that"—Kitty stopped on a sudden, and put the letter back in its envelope.

"Ladies don't like to have their letters to each other read aloud," she said, smiling; "and though Ella and I have no secrets, we are afraid of such sharp criticism as yours."

Sir George laughed, and threw his own letters across the table to her.

"Don't betray poor Ella's confidence, on any account; but answer those letters for me, there's a good child, and tell Ella when you write that we cannot possibly bring our honeymoon to an end yet."

Kitty looked up with an expression of disappointment.

"Why not do Tyrrell and Ella a good turn, and leave them to make love in peace? We should only spoil the thing."

Kitty acquiesced of course, and did her best to seem pleased, though she was dying to be away, and fairly on the road to England. It ought to have flattered her vanity, if it did not touch her heart, that Sir George could so entirely content himself with her society. She chafed at his easy, complacent mood instead, and wanted him to feel something of her own impatience, forgetting that, whereas marriage had wholly altered the tenor of her own life, it affected his very little. He was delighted to have a young, handsome, and submissive wife, and regarded the alliance as a great achievement ; but there, for the present, the matter ended. He hoped and prayed every Sunday in church —for Sir George was an exemplary church-goer—that the blessing always desired by husbands should fall on his marriage. Beyond this he had no ambitions. Kitty had a thousand.

Of what use were parks and mansions and titles except to be enjoyed ? Of what use was her wit, unless she moved in the world ; or her beauty, unless there were eyes to delight in it ? Partly from imagination, and partly from such fashionable life as novel-reading had made familiar to her, she drew a picture of her future, and delighted to dwell on it. She was to be a leader of fashion in London, a Lady Bountiful in the country, a patroness of poor artists, and a beneficent, happy, ruling spirit in any society among which she might find herself. Hitherto her career had been successful beyond her expectations. She looked very far forward, undoubting, as of old.

Six weeks passed—to Kitty's thinking the six dullest weeks of her life—and then they returned home.

"Well," Sir George said, as they came within sight of the villa, "I can honestly say that I never spent a happier time in my life. I hope you are of the same manner of thinking, my dear ?"

"Have I looked otherwise than happy ?" Kitty asked.

"I think you have had just a touch of melancholy now and then. But that is quite becoming. Every right-minded young lady is a little melancholy after her marriage ; as, indeed, she well may be, for marriage is a most serious thing—most serious," Sir George added. "A good Christian woman will then look

into her heart, and see how far she is fitted for the solemn responsibilities of wife, mother, and citizen"—

Fortunately for Kitty the monologue was interrupted by a chorus of welcoming voices. They had come suddenly upon Ella and the Gardiners, grouped on the lawn; and after a great deal of hand-shaking, and a little kissing among the ladies, all went in-doors to partake of tea. After a little time, Ella and Kitty were left alone. Kitty went up to her friend, hung over her, kissed her, clasped her hand, and seemed fain to cry of joy.

"I am so glad to be with you again, my darling," she said. "Have they taken good care of you? Have you been happy?"

"Everybody has been very good to me," Ella answered. "The six weeks have slipped away, I hardly know how."

"Ah!" Kitty cried, reproachfully, "then you did not miss me much?"

"I have indeed missed you," Ella said, trying to look cheerful; "but was it not right to begin learning my hard lesson at once? You belong to papa now, and cannot devote all your time to me."

"As if I should ever love you less dearly!"

"As if I doubted your affection or my own, dear Kitty. It would, nevertheless, be unreasonable to claim the thought and self-sacrifice you once gave me. Papa must be first in your eyes, and you first in his, you know."

She said this smiling, though with underlying sadness in her voice, and changed the subject. Had Kitty found Ronda so very beautiful? Had she and Sir George decided upon returning to England soon? Should they stay in London for a little while? Was Akenholme to be repaired, and put in order, etcetera? Kitty answering with a blank face.

By and by, the conversation fell back into the old channel; and it was Kitty's turn to ask questions.

"Mr Tyrrell has been here a great deal?" she asked.

"More than ever. What is to be done?" Ella said, with comic dismay.

Kitty laughed.

"Mr Tyrrell is delightful!" she said. "Perfectly delightful!"

"And very fond of you?"

"So it seems."

"And you are fond of him?"

"Not in equal proportion, I think," Ella answered. "But he has been so good to me whilst you were away, that it is only natural I should wish to be good to him. He must, however, have patience."

Just then Sir George came in. Would Kitty be so good as to go and find such and such a packet for him? The servants were far too stupid. And then, would she order the dinner to be a little earlier? He was so hungry. Thirdly, would she help him with his letters for half an hour? He must send off several to England that evening.

Of course Kitty complied. Formerly Ella would have said, "Dear papa, I am sure all these things can wait till poor Kitty is rested a little." But now Ella perforce must hold her peace.

Kitty hardly knew how it was that these first days of her return seemed vexatious. Sir George was kind; Ella was affectionate; things went on smoothly in the house; yet she could have cried of sheer weariness from day to day. She accounted for such fits of chagrin in this way—"I am so childish and little-minded as to be piqued by the fact of Ella having a lover, and seeing daily and hourly how Mr Tyrrell has usurped my supremacy and my influence. But is not this behaving like a school-girl? Ought not a lover to usurp the first place, leaving the second for a friend?"

It was not likely that Kitty's introspection should go deeper than this. We do not play the moralist to ourselves; and even had another spoken the plain though subtle truth to her, she would have gone away unbelieving. For the truth must have been this: Kitty and Ella could no longer sympathise with each other, no longer love each other, no longer delight in each other as before, simply because the less noble nature had knowingly, if not wilfully, wronged the nobler; and the wrong, though pardoned, was inevitably working out its retribution in self-abasement. We cannot completely love or be completely loved by those whose loftiest principles we have outraged. .

## CHAPTER LXVII.

*LADY BARTELOTTE IS INTRODUCED.*

AN English spring was not to be thought of for Ella ; and as Malaga had become monotonous of late, the little party journeyed to Cannes, where it was proposed to stay till April.

Cannes is eminently a gay place. Pic-nics, luncheons, dinners, and balls, succeed each other without intermission ; and Kitty and Ella entered with zest into as much society as Sir George would countenance. Kitty wanted to see what fashionable life was like, and whether she should be as successful in it as she had been in such phases of life as were familiar to her. Ella's motives were purely unselfish. She saw in the distractions of intelligent society Kitty's only chance of happiness, and did all in her power to get Kitty introduced and welcomed into the choicest coteries.

There was a certain Lady Adela C——, whose house was one of the most pleasant places of afternoon resort ; and it was Ella's achievement to get Kitty graciously received by her. Lady Adela might be called really a distinguished woman, and her house in Paris was frequented not only by princes and nobles, but by men of learning and women of genius. She had the happy art of filtering society so delicately that the finest sense could never detect a gross element in the stream she kept flowing about her. And the stream sparkled and glowed like a fountain with a rainbow playing on it, reflecting as it did so many bright and harmonious minds.

Hitherto, Kitty had outshone Ella in society, which was hardly wonderful, since the one possessed twice as many, and twice as striking personal attractions, and strove to shine ; whilst the other ever hid herself in some quiet corner, and watched the animated masses around her, as a looker-on only.

Kitty, accompanied by Sir George and Ella, had come for the first time to one of Lady Adela's crowded afternoon parties. The ubiquitous Tyrrell, was there, of course. He knew Lady Adela of old, and had somewhat mischievously rejoiced at the idea of Kitty being introduced to her. He no longer sat at

Kitty's feet—if indeed he had ever done so—and longed to see the tables turned for once, and Ella outshining her for a little space.

Lady Adela was as shrewd as could possibly be, and detected pretence, veneer, and flattering acquiescence at once. He felt sure she would have no sympathy and very limited admiration for Kitty.

She received her visitors in a charming south room, opening upon a garden full of coloured gladioli, and other brilliant flowers, which burned like flames against the deep blue sea. Leading out of this were other rooms, one a music-room, &c. ; and after a little talk with their host, the guests dispersed themselves, and selected conversation or music and croquet, according to taste. But Kitty and Ella, being strangers, were taken especial care of, and were introduced to a great many of Lady Adela's friends.

Later in the afternoon Mr Tyrrell entered, and at an exultant glance saw how matters stood.

There was Ella, his dainty Ella, dressed in simple white muslin sitting away from the crowd, as utterly oblivious of self as a child. Gathered round her were Lady Adela, with two or three of the most interesting and distinguished persons in the room ; and they were holding an animated conversation about art, which Mr Tyrrell would fain have joined, but feared to interrupt.

And where was Kitty ?

Lady Bartelotte, who had come superbly dressed in the latest fashion, and who was sure to have done her best to please, and be pleased, sat in the dullest room surrounded by two or three officers from Gibraltar, and some very young ladies, the most insignificant people of the whole company.

Extreme youth is a somewhat unmanageable element in society, unless left to itself. Kitty's companions had been obliged to give up croquet on account of the heat, and she was trying to amuse them. Mr Tyrrell, seeing that she looked bored, charitably sat down beside her, and after a little conversation, brought from a side-table a large basket of cartes-de-visite of dead and living celebrities, those invaluable aids to lagging talk.

He took up a handful.

"Greek Brigands, the Emperor Theodore, Pio Nono, Bismarck, and Martin Tupper! It reminds me of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel," he said, laughing.

And then he proposed a game of his own invention with the cartes-de-visite, in which the young ladies and gentlemen joined delightedly. The photographs were numbered minus so much, or plus so much, according to the writer's estimation; and when each card was drawn, the drawer had to pay or receive, as the case might be, negligence being punished by forfeits; a dish of sugar-plums and bonbons from the tea-room being appropriated as counters.

In the midst of the game Kitty drew a card that made her change colour and pause. It was the portrait of Dr Norman, and Mr Tyrrell had written in the corner, 'plus thousand,' the highest number awarded.

"Why do you look so shocked, Lady Bartelotte?" exclaimed Mr Tyrrell. "Is it the portrait of Mr Swinburne, Home the spiritualist, or La Soeur Patrocino?"

"No," Kitty said, very slowly. "This is a portrait of no celebrity, but of a private gentleman, an old friend of mine. It must be here by mistake."

"Dr Norman no celebrity!" cried Tyrrell, with animation. "That comes of living so much abroad, Lady Bartelotte. But you must know Dr Norman has been doing great things in science of late, and will be ranked among the Herschells, and Tyndalls, and Lyells of the day. Do pass round his portrait."

Then the portrait was criticised and admired; and Mr Tyrrell fetched a certain French Professor from the next room, that Kitty might have some talk with him about her old friend. Lady Adela soon came in with her party, and she desired the Professor to recommence the story for their benefit, adding—

"Lady Bartelotte is indeed an enviable person to know Dr Norman so well; and when the Professor has done, we must beg for her story."

The Professor had just come from England, and told in a

few sentences the purport of Dr Norman's lectures at the Royal Institution, which he had heard, and the great effect produced by them in the scientific world. Then he gave a touching sketch of a certain odd little daughter of Dr Norman's, a child of eleven or twelve, who could not control her unbounded enthusiasm at the end of his last lecture, and kissed him as he stood among his congratulating friends, much to his embarrassment.

Poor Kitty answered the eager questions put to her in a very bald fashion indeed. For the life of her she could not give an animated account of Dr Norman and his family. She heard all sorts of kind and sympathetic things said about him ; she heard of the congratulations that he had received from high quarters ; she heard of his face being praised for its sweet, noble, earnest expression, with cold acquiescence and inward mortification, and was thankful when Lady Adela proposed tea, and that the little group broke up.

But she did not forget Dr Norman's portrait. That he should create such an excitement among fashionable circles she could not at all understand. She recalled him as she had known him in the old days at Shelley House—prematurely old, a little absent, a little old-fashioned, to her thinking, and quite regardless of appearances. It seemed preposterous that such a man should have anything in common with Lady Adela's set. She cast her eyes about the room, and thought how out of place he would have looked among these fashionable men and women. A certain French prince of the Imperial family had conducted her to the refreshment-room ; the lady chatting to her was a peer's daughter, and of the bluest blood in England. Sir George was holding a young marquis by the button. The reception of Dr Norman's history by Lady Adela's guests puzzled her, and set her thinking ! Should she ever meet him ? Was there, after all, so little difference between his rank and that of her husband ? Had social degradation ceased to exist, as Sir George often declared to be the case in his anti-democratic speeches ? It was not that she envied Dr Norman's success—it was doubt in her own that made her uneasy.

This first experience of fashionable society on a large scale

had disappointed her. She wondered whether as Dr Norman's wife she would have found herself of so little account ?

Sir George here came up and introduced his friend to her. A walk round the pretty gardens with them dispelled Kitty's grave thoughts for a time ; then the little party returned home.

"How well Popham is looking !" Sir George said to Ella. "And did you have any talk with our neighbours, the Vernons ?"

"With the Colonel, yes," Ella answered ; "but Cecilia was not there, and I don't know the other daughters."

"It was a pleasant party. How did you enjoy it, my dear ?" asked Sir George of Kitty.

"It amused me," Kitty said, "but I shall like the next better. One feels a little lost among such crowds of strangers for the first time."

"True, true."

Then Sir George told Ella of other old friends he had met, and Kitty fell into a train of reflections. It was natural that Ella and Sir George should find plenty to say to each other about former acquaintances, yet she could not help taking it amiss, and chafing at her new sense of isolation. Among such little circles as they had formed at Fontainebleau, Arcachon, and Malaga, she was ever the moving spirit, and the misgiving for the first time crossed her mind whether her supremacy was not already a thing of the past.

Kitty was like Ulysses. She would rather rule in Ithaca than serve on Olympus. She would rather be first of a small coterie than of little account among crowds.

How would it be in England ? She awaited the future, if not as ambitiously, at least as uneasily, as of old.

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## CHAPTER LXVIII.

DR NORMAN gave his first lecture about a fortnight after Laura's return home. The brilliant success of which Mr Tyrrell had spoken came later, but his opening paper was far too novel

and telling to meet with a lukewarm reception. He felt anxious that his little Laura should share the good things of fortune that might fall to him, and determined to call on his way home. Putting Prissy under the protection of a friend, he took a cab to Fortescue Terrace—so pretentiously was the little street called—arriving thither soon after ten o'clock.

It happened that Dr Norman had forgotten the number of the house, though he remembered its physiognomy perfectly well. So he dismissed his cab at the top of the street, and looked out carefully for the particular little garden with its miniature rock-work, for the antique lamp with which Mr Perugino had adorned his hall, and for other signs peculiar to him.

"What noisy neighbours Laura has!" thought Dr Norman, as he walked along very slowly. "I hope this quiet little spot will not turn out to be less desirable than we first thought it!"

For a loud chorus proceeded from the lower end of the street, and the burden of the song was one made too familiar some years ago by hand-organs, hurdy-gurdies, and street-singers, namely, "Villikins and his Dinah." Now, if ever a comic song was harmless, it is this said "Villikins and his Dinah," and yet there is something unspeakably vagabondish and roystering in the "Too-roolo-too-roolo-do" of the refrain.

When the sight of the well-known lamp arrested Dr Norman's steps, he was dismayed to find that the noise here reached its culminating point. He paused—he listened. The singing proceeded from Laura's drawing-room beyond a doubt.

His first impulse was to turn back in sorrow, anger, and shame. Had Perry already broken his promise of forsaking former habits and former friends? Was this the sort of distraction he deemed fit for a refined young wife? And from such a beginning what might be expected in days to come?

On second thoughts he determined to enter and judge for himself. Surely Laura and Perry would wish their home to be freely open to him always! And, after all, there might be no real harm in the mirth which, to him, seemed so offensive.

He knocked, his own familiar knock, boldly, and the door was immediately opened. But by whom?

Dr Norman naturally felt a little startled by the appearance

of a tall and striking-looking Hindoo woman, who wore her native costume, and no insignificant display of trinkets. She looked as if she had just served as a model for some Oriental subject, and, indeed, such was the case. Since Perry's return from Algiers, he could never be sufficiently reminded, as he grandiosely said, of barbaric splendour and Eastern beauty ; so the woman—who was a very respectable person, married to one of her own people—had been engaged from Mrs Cornford's studio to help at Laura's first "At Home."

Perry had insisted upon the necessity of giving Polly Cornford and some of "the fellows" one little supper, adding—

"There is no occasion for us to ask 'em again, but it would be the height of ingratitude not to let 'em see what a wife I have got, and what a snug little house my brick of a father-in-law has given us!"

Thus it came about that Polly Cornford, Crosbie Carrington, Vittoria's unmarried sister Theresina, Vittoria and her husband, and another friend of Perry's, had been invited to Laura's little "At Home."

When Dr Norman entered the drawing-room, and saw of whom the company was composed, his heart grew lighter.

"I'm afraid we frightened you with our Too—roo—loo—do, Doctor ?" said Mrs Cornford, gaily ; "but a comic song is only a sermon turned upside down, you know ; and if we must be moral in this world, we may as well be merry over it. Shall we give you another ?"

"Papa would like to hear Perry play something of Mendelsohn's best," Laura began, nervously. "Perry, dear, will you play to papa ?"

"I must look at Perugino's new picture first," Dr Norman said, and went up to the easel ; for of course Laura's little drawing-room was turned into a studio on Perry's idle days.

"Oh, it is nothing," Perry answered—"a mere peak. I said I would imitate G——" (naming one of our leading painters), "and I did it. I shall begin to work steadily next week. But you must see what Laura has done."

"Oh no, Perry !" Laura cried, shyly.

But Perry persisted in bringing out a little picture of Laura's ;

and the quietude of the house was again disturbed. "Huzza! Mrs Neeve!" cried the gentlemen. "Huzza! bravo! Laura!" cried the ladies, clapping their hands. Poor Dr Norman retreated to a chair, stunned with the unaccustomed noise.

There was a lull, and Laura talked about the lecture; and Dr Norman asked her to bring Perry to dinner the next day, to meet some friends. When Perry had played a little, supper was announced. Dr Norman gave Mrs Cornford his arm, and the little party descended.

Poor Laura looked across the table, envying Perry's happy unconcern, and dreading every moment lest something should occur to shock her father's sense of propriety. The very supper, too, was so unlike anything to which she had been accustomed at home. What would he think of it? Perry had ordered it himself, and of course Perry knew what his friends liked; but Dr Norman's taste was another thing.

"We dined early, papa," she said, apologetically, "which accounts for such substantial dishes"—

"Well," Polly Cornford cried, "I'm not ashamed to confess that when invited out to a supper I can depend on, I go without my dinner; it saves my pocket and compliments my friends."

"Bravo! Polly!" cried Perry, rapping his fingers on the table—"bravo!"

Laura crimsoned, but Dr Norman did his best to reassure her, by appearing at ease with her visitors.

"I commend your plan, Mrs Cornford," he said; "but I could not adopt it unless my friends supped somewhat earlier."

"As to the matter of that," said Polly, "there's nothing like art to give one a handy sort of appetite. We artists never think about our dinners if we've got a good model or a good light, and feel in painting humour, but just snatch a mouthful and bide our time. I can honestly say that there isn't an hour from twelve in the morning to twelve at night which doesn't perfectly suit me for the business of dinner. But, help the lobster, my good Perry, whilst your wife carves the chickens; and I'll mix the salad"—

"Won't you begin with a bit of chicken, or steak?" Laura asked.

"The fact is," Perry said, comically, "it has just been discovered in the kitchen that we are short of oil and vinegar; and the cook has had to run to Number Nine to borrow the cruet-stand. We lent 'em our Stilton cheese for a luncheon last week, so it is only an interchange of civilities."

"Perry!" cried Laura, looking greatly vexed, "you should not let your guests see what a bad housekeeper I am."

"When the fact is taken into consideration that we've only been housekeeping a fortnight, I think they will be surprised to get a supper at all," Perry said. "But here is the cruet-stand. Now, Polly, for your salad."

"It's a long process, so meantime I'll amuse the company with a story." Polly began—"Once upon a time there was an artist, and that artist was a woman, and putting the two things together, you'll hardly need to be told that she got more kicks than halfpence. Well, to cut a long story short, the kicks came like hailstones, and the halfpence didn't come at all, and the artist's heart"—here Polly grew warm, and she misplaced her H's recklessly—"was heavy within her. Ladies and gentleman, I am not ashamed to confess that it is my own story I am telling, and that the friend who sent the duns from my door and set me on my legs again, is here among us."

Here Polly clapped Dr Norman on the back, and added—

"Nay, never be ashamed of having done a kind action, Doctor! When you sent little Laura with twenty pounds to me in my hour of need, I could have cried."

Polly's tears and laughter always kept close company, and, as she said this, a real honest tear glistened in her eye. A murmur of applause ran through the little party; then all looked grave, as befitted the occasion. Monsieur Puig, who was the pink of politeness, wiped away an invisible tear, and nudged his wife to do the same. Laura's cheeks glowed with pleasure at the homage her father was receiving, and she clasped his hand for a moment lovingly. Dr Norman looked supremely uncomfortable.

"Why, we all look as glum as Quakers saying grace," Mrs Cornford added; "but I hope we shall be as merry as grigs by and by; and if Perry proposes Dr Norman's health, I'll second the motion."

"And I shall drink a *boom-pair*," said Monsieur Puig.

"He means a bumper, I suppose," Mrs Cornford said, bluntly; "but Piggy's English is not everything that could be wished."

Then the business of the supper began; and it lasted so long that Dr Norman was obliged to make his apologies and go in the midst.

"You should have brought Prissy, sir," Perry said. "She has not yet paid us a visit."

"I don't think it would have been well to bring Prissy this evening. What do you say, Laura?" asked Dr Norman.

"Oh no, papa," poor Laura answered, finding a much more vexatious purport in her father's words than was really intended, "I will fetch her for a long day when we are quite by ourselves."

Then Dr Norman went away. He hardly knew whether to laugh or weep over the experiences of the evening. There was evidently no harm in these guests of Perry's; and some of them, Mrs Cornford and Vittoria, for instance, he heartily liked. Vittoria's manner was perfectly unobjectionable, gentle, modest, feminine. But with all Mrs Cornford's good qualities, he confessed that her free and easy behaviour was inexpressibly distasteful to him. He could not support the idea of his little Laura catching her tone in ever so slight a degree; and how impossible it is not to catch the tone of one's intimate friends! Who can say, moreover, where bad manners end, and bad morals begin? He determined to have a long and earnest talk with Perry on the subject. Perry was so sweet-tempered, so pliable, and so utterly devoid of anything like self-assertion, that he could but be hopeful as to the result.

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## CHAPTER LXIX.

### *PERRY UNDER DOMESTICATION.*

IT is needless to say that Laura was supremely happy. At first the habits of her lord and master were somewhat disconcerting to her orderly notions. For instance, he would often lie in bed till eleven o'clock, and after a hasty breakfast in dressing-gown and slippers, rush off to his studio at Fulham, expecting dinner

at any moment he might happen to return. Or, if he stayed at home, he would paint, promiscuously attired, in her little drawing-room, till what with paint-brushes, painting rags, and other artistic paraphernalia, it became so littered as to require an entire cleaning. It must be admitted that Mr Perugino stayed at home a great deal. He delighted in his home ; he delighted in the society of his young wife ; he delighted to teach her music and painting, or any other accomplishment of which he was master. He delighted, too, in the business of house-keeping. There was hardly a branch of this department, from ordering the dinner to cleaning the plate, that Mr Perugino did not thoroughly understand. One day he would astonish the proper-minded middle-aged cook Dr Norman had provided for them, by blacking the boots of the little household, offering to include her own, with the remark—

“Now, Jemima, if ever, is the time to take a walk with the object of your affections, for I was born a shoebblack, and understand my business.”

Dr Norman sent his son-in-law the present of a small cask of sherry, and over the bottling of it he was as happy as a child over a new toy. Of course, Polly must have a bottle, and Petroffsky a bottle, and Vittoria and Piggy two bottles, and everybody else of his acquaintance a bottle, so that the sherry was finished in no time. But it was with regard to his manner of spending Sundays that Mr Perugino received a series of curtain lectures. Laura's ideas of Sunday were orthodox—morning service, punctual lunch, and cold dinner ; every sign of work put aside, and the indulgence only of quiet amusements. But Perry was very untractable on this head. Again and again he would promise to accompany Laura to church the very next Sunday ; but Sunday after Sunday came, and just as the last bell was tolling, Mr Perugino would put his head out of his little dressing-room, and make excuse. Laura invariably had to go alone. Jemima was a Methodist, moreover ; and by way, as Perry said, of giving her a more liberal turn of mind, he would play lively tunes on his guitar, or offer to take her portrait, which, as Jemima said, made her shudder to think of—“yet it was impossible to be angry with the master.”

Such was Perry's conduct under the process of domestication, as naturalists say. No wild young elephant caught in the corrals of Ceylon could show a greater dislike to being tamed than he, and he flew to his old studio as a refuge, and to his old friend for sympathy.

"If I haven't a spur in my side," he said in these days to Polly Cornford, "I've a bit in my mouth, and no mistake about it. I've heard of mothers-in-law"—here he made a grimace of dismay—"but I'll be hanged if fathers-in-law are not ten times worse."

"You are a lucky dog to have Dr Norman for yours," answered Polly.

"Oh yes"—here Perry made another wry face—"but he leads me a terrible life of it, I assure you. I daren't say my soul is my own."

"What does that matter? The clothes on your back are, which is much more important."

"I can see well enough what the doctor is driving at. He wants me to stick to work, and save my money, and become a respectable member of society," Perry said, indignantly; "but I won't be driven to anything—I tell you I won't be driven, Polly!" He added, in a doleful voice—"I've no longer a spark of ambition in me. When a man loses—you understand what I would say, Polly. Laura and I are as happy as can be, but a little dull sometimes. I'm an ungrateful wretch to say so, but such is the truth. If I could only forget that a woman had never lived of whom one could say, 'Time cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.'"

"Oh yes, I know what to expect of you," Polly said, bitterly. "Laura is an angel, and Kitty was the opposite. Because you are happy, you think how much pleasanter it would have been to be scolded, and sermonised, and quarrelled with, and looked down upon; whereas little Laura worships the very ground you tread upon—the more fool she!"

Perry never got much condolence from Polly Cornford, you may be sure. His prosperity was the crowning satisfaction of her life, and she talked of it by day, and dreamed of it by night. She wrote to Kitty about it—perhaps the only little

bit of malice Polly had ever indulged in ; but as she said to Vittoria—

“A woman can no more help being spiteful, if injured by another, than a man can help using his fists if affronted by a blackguard.”

Perry had, indeed, a bit in his mouth, though it was held by a light and careful hand. Dr Norman managed his son-in-law with great skill. In a spirit half of playfulness, half of gentle resistance, he had contrived to make his way into the young man’s confidence ; and once that victory achieved, the rest was easy. Perry’s superficial vagabondage he let alone. If he preferred to breakfast at noon, and go unkempt in his shirt-sleeves for the rest of the day, what did it matter to him ? If he liked Artemus Ward and French novels better than any other literature, that was equally Mr Perugino’s own affair. But since Perry had married a young wife, it was surely his duty to bestir himself a little, and go about the business of life in a manly spirit. Dr Norman set a hundred little traps of the kind Perry was too blind to see. For instance, he would send him the following note—

“DEAR PERUGINO,—Will you bring Laura to dine with me to-morrow at seven o’clock ? So-and-so” (naming the very person Perry had expressed a desire to meet) “is coming, &c., &c. ; all of them worth your while to know. Yours truly,

E. N.

“P.S.—I will send my fly-man for you exactly at a quarter to seven, and he shall bring you back.”

Of course Perry would take Laura ; and the consequences were, that the young artist made plenty of influential friends, and saw himself fairly on the road to fortune. At the house of his father-in-law he met art lovers, who looked upon a new genius as so much treasure-trove ; art critics, artists, and cultivated men and women of the world, who took kindly to Perry, as was only natural. When Polly Cornford heard of the invitations sent to Perry and Laura from houses of the best standing, her eyes beamed with pleasure. She was content to paint clever, ill-paid pictures in her lonely little studio all her life, so long as Perry flourished like a bay-tree. Poor old

Petroffsky, whose memory no more retained what was said to him than a sieve retains water, used to nod at Polly's good news, and smile, and try to hit the right nail on the head, by saying—

“There is nobody like Kitty Silvare—*j'ai dit cela toujours, mon amie.*”

He thought Perry had married Kitty all the time! Perry, therefore, prospered against his will. When his picture was hung on the line at the Academy, and obtained flattering notices in the newspapers, and he was pointed out as the next A.R.A. to be elected, and fortune smiled upon him, do you suppose he was as grateful as it behoved him to be? Do you suppose in his secret heart he called himself a lucky fellow? O stern moralists! look into your own hearts and forgive! Which of us does not think he could improve upon Providence now and then? We are like big children at a lottery, and would fain change our prizes, were they the very ones we have coveted. Perry was sure to enjoy life very much. With his loving, gifted nature, anything like moroseness was impossible. He merely felt a little dull sometimes, as he had said to Polly Cornford—

“Ah! what days those were when we all lived together, without a care and without a sixpence,” was the sentiment this ungrateful young cynic would utter. “A bottle of champagne was a bottle of champagne then.”

“Which wasn't often,” Polly answered.

“And a song was a song when I was a young harum-scarum,” Perry added. “I'm a proper sort of person now. I've no debts. My position improves every day; but on my soul, Polly, I couldn't sing to a merry tune if it were to save my life.”

But it must be said on Perry's behalf, that he did not fall into a moralising mood very often. Laura thought herself the happiest person in God's beautiful world. Whether Perry were idle or industrious, sad or merry, devoted to her happiness or addicted to solitude—for Mr Perugino had alternate fits of asceticism and sociability—were all one. He was her husband, her joy, her darling. She wondered whether other women loved their husbands as much as she did, and whether

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such love made them as happy. On the whole, then, Dr Norman had reason to be thankful. Laura loved Perry too fondly to take his shortcomings to heart ; and, so long as Perry was under his eye, they could not take much harm. Of course the young couple got into difficulties now and then, for Perry adhered to the maxim dear to Bohemia—"Take no thought for the morrow." They would occasionally wake up to find themselves without money. Perry would shock Laura by buying some rare old oak cabinet with the money she had been saving up for the quarter's butcher's and baker's bills. Or they would determine upon the most rigid economy in eating and drinking, in order to buy a bit of tapestry Perry had taken a fancy to, till both fell ill from sheer want of proper food. Amongst Dr Norman's boys Perry reigned supreme ; and Prissy liked him sincerely. But Prissy had only one hero, who was her father. She clung to him more and more as time wore on, and gloried in his distinction as Laura gloried in Perry's. What Dr Norman's life would have been without the love of his little daughter he dared not think ; and it seemed to brighten the future, as a distant ray of sunlight brightens some far-off field.

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## CHAPTER LXX.

THE Bartelottes returned to England in May ; and Sir George and Kitty went straight to Akenholme Park, till the house in Clarges Street should be got into order. Ella stayed with friends in London. Kitty had never been into the Eastern counties before, and found it dreary. There was the departure from Shoreditch Station to begin with. What can be more conducive to a suicidal state of mind than the long, tortuous winding of the train over the squalid, smoky districts of Stepney and Stratford ? No sunshine brightens, no breeze penetrates those dusky regions of London, which look more fit for the habitation of Cyclops and ghouls than of civilised men and women. When at last the train was speeding amid bright

green fields and trim villages, they left off regretting foreign lands, and grew cheerful. Kitty was dying to see Akenholme Park, and to take her place as mistress of it. She felt sure she would be happy there.

"We shall have to rough it a little till we get back to London," Sir George said. "I told Dawson not to hire more than one or two servants, as our plans are so uncertain."

"You and I are fortunately not so fastidious as dear Ella," Kitty answered, smiling.

Akenholme Park was a pretty place enough, as far as natural advantages went, possessing soft green slopes, and noble oaks, and a garden capable of development into something really enticing. The house was well-built and comfortable. There were a few good pictures on the walls, a little choice old furniture, collections of china, coins, and the usual heirlooms of a house, if not ancient or splendid, at least of respectable age, and moderate wealth. The great treasure of Akenholme Park was one which Kitty could appreciate very little, namely, a small but choice library of rare old books. What troubled Kitty was the shabbiness of the place. The carpets were threadbare, the colours of the curtains faded past recognition, the papers on the walls discoloured with age. The garden was utterly run to waste. The stables were empty. The old family carriage dilapidated past mending. She tried to coax Sir George into a little lavishness, by all womanly, wifely arts.

"Dearest," she would say, making him look at this or that piece of faded upholstery, "you shall have no rest till you let me go to Ipswich and order the new furniture for the drawing-room."

Whereupon Sir George would only shake his head and chuckle at Kitty's supreme naïveté and overweening ambition. As if the furniture that had been good enough for Ella was not good enough for a young lady brought up in Paradise Place, forsooth! He would merely say—

"We must see what the preparations in London come to first, you know. Do, for the present, leave off bewailing the furniture, and help me with my books."

Poor Kitty had to pay dearly in these days for the interest she had formerly affected to take in old books. Sir George was never tired of re-arranging and re-cataloguing his treasures, and why should not Kitty help him, since she was so conversant with the subject of bibliography, and so fond of it, too! Morning after morning was spent in the monotonous work of writing, from Sir George's dictation, the names and dates of musty old Plutarchs and Horaces, and Facciolatis and Chaucers, and making lists of Aldine editions, and other editions, in which she took not the slightest interest. If she grew pale and weary, Sir George had the shabby little pony-carriage put to, and would drive her to see his farms, or to the nearest post-town to get his letters.

"We won't call upon any one till we return from London," he had said; and as they effectually hid themselves from observation, Lady Bartelotte received no visits. Sometimes she went into the village to play the Lady Bountiful; but how much more difficult it was to be the Lady Bountiful of Akenholme Park than of Shelley House! In Dr. Norman's house a store of wine and meat was always at hand for the sick or aged poor; in Sir George's there never seemed anything to give away. Dawson, the housekeeper—by no means the traditional housekeeper in black silk and widow's cap Kitty had expected—but a homely old soul, who had been chosen by Sir George for her thrift and pliability of disposition, used to answer her mistress's questions thus—

"Lors! my lady, there's no sort o' use in yer ladyship listening to them folks. They'll make a lady like you believe a sucking-pig is a red herrin', with their artful talk. Sir George gives away coals and meat to the good church-goers at Christmas, and a sovereign to all the lying-in women on his estates, and five shillings extra to them as have boys; and what more would they have? There's no gratitude in poor folks, as yer ladyship will soon find out."

Kitty proposed to Sir George that she should take an interest in the Sunday-school; but he cautioned her against pledging herself to anything very serious.

"It is all very well to hold with the clergyman of your parish,

and attend church, and that sort of thing. I'm a good Conservative, and I would do as much for Church and State as anybody. But, my dear, you don't know what it is to be hand and glove with a country rector. First he wants money for repairing the church, then for the schools, then for a new organ, then for the choir, till what with one thing and another, your hand is always in your pocket."

So Kitty was compelled to receive the friendly invitations of the rector's family with polite frigidity ; and to give up the idea of reigning supreme in the parish.

"We shall see a little of our neighbours in the autumn, I suppose ?" she said to her husband one day.

"My dear, I don't think you would care for our neighbours. We shall interchange calls and personal visits, of course ; but they are richer than we, and it is better not to get too intimate. We must be economical, and think of what need of economy the future—under God's blessing—may bring."

Kitty wondered how she should continue to spend the days at Akenholme Park without Ella ; for Ella had bound herself over to share Mr Tyrrell's home one day. There was a piano, there was a flower-garden, there was a pony-carriage ; but little else upon which she could count for amusement. Without the prospect of occasional visits to London and Ella, her future looked dull enough. For in spite of all that had threatened to estrange them, and had, in truth, marred the first sweetness of their friendship, Kitty clung to Ella as of old. What the lives of some women would be without the friendship of other women, is only known to God and themselves. Kitty was fain to make much of the only friend left to her of so many ! Matters mended as soon as they reached London. The house in Clarges Street had been repaired and embellished. Ella had engaged a respectable staff of servants ; a pretty open carriage was indulged in ; and the household arrangements were put on a comfortable footing. To Sir George's intense satisfaction in the prospect of Ella's wealthy marriage—Mr Tyrrell was, moreover, heir to a baronetcy—much of this liberality was owing. He loved Ella as dearly as ever, but his own marriage had altered the course of things, and naturally he wanted to have

Kitty as much as possible to himself. For Kitty seemed to him to grow more bewitching every day. Kitty's dreams, therefore, had come true at last—the dreams of wealth, of elegance, of refinement. She was presented at Court ; she was invited to sumptuous houses ; she drove in the parks, as she had longed to do in the days of her scheming, sulky, and yet how well-beloved girlhood ! It was very pleasant ; and she would have liked the season to last all the year round. The late hours, the dazzling lights, the round of formal calls, never wearied her, as they soon wearied Ella. She attended morning concerts, and as she leaned back in her velvet chair on the first row, recalled the old days with a smile. Then she used to sit with Perry in the orchestra, and he amused himself during the intervals by cracking nuts for her, or drawing caricatures of the performers on his programme. Ambition was silent within her for a while, and she only cared to enjoy. These bland, soft-minded ladies and gentlemen she met night after night, did not frighten her, as she had expected they would do. There was no occasion to shine or seem clever. It sufficed to look agreeable, and do nothing. One evening Kitty and Sir George attended a brilliant soiree at the South Kensington Museum. The place was crowded to the last inch with well-dressed people, who trod on each other's toes, jostled each other, and elbowed each other with graceful apology. There was a band of good music, and a refreshment-room, to which Sir George, who always liked refreshments, took Kitty. Whilst sipping their tea, a tall, dark-browed, much-bearded man, entered, with a fair-haired, round-cheeked, languid-looking lady on his arm. Kitty did not know that Myra and Captain Longley were again in England, and started. Before she had time to whisper their names in her husband's ear, they approached, and were in the act of sitting down, when Myra recognised her friend. Kitty, without thinking, smiled, and was about to advance ; but Myra turned away, and Captain Longley followed. It was evidently intended for a dead cut ! Kitty coloured a little.

"I had forgotten how angry I made Myra two years ago," she said. "She must do as she pleases about forgiving me."

"Confound their impertinence!" said Sir George. "The

idea of Mrs Longley cutting you is preposterous ; but she never quite knew what etiquette was ; and camp life in India has not taught her, it seems."

Myra had treated the matter much more seriously, and was quite pale with excitement.

"I hoped I might never, never see her again," she said to her husband. "No one knows how I loved her, and how she deceived me."

"And I have little cause to be grateful to Miss Silver—I beg her pardon—Lady Bartelotte," Captain Longley rejoined. "She did me an ill turn when I first paid court to you."

"Was she well dressed? Did she look happy?" asked Myra.

"I really never noticed her dress or her looks; but they are still there, and I will take a survey on the sly." So saying the captain put up his glass and eyed the pair. "Yes, I should say she is well dressed."

"Do they appear pleased with each other's company ? "

Again Captain Longley took a survey.

"I should say," he said, slowly, "that she is a little bored; and no wonder, for I always looked upon Sir George as the most consummate little prig on the face of the earth."

Kitty appeared to treat the matter lightly, but she did not forget it. Why could not Myra let bygones be bygones? Had she no recollection of human devotion? If the one had been lavish in worldly things, the other had been profuse in gifts of a rarer kind. They might surely cry quits now and be friends. Myra's conduct disconcerted her. It was vulgar on grounds of etiquette, and high-flown as a matter of sentiment. Kitty, in homely phrase, wanted to have her cake and eat it; to use her friends as best suited her, and retain their friendship. But friendship is a garden of flowers, to be cultivated with tenderest love and care; not a plot of common ground, to be dealt with according to its marketable value. So, in time, Kitty found out.

## CHAPTER LXXI.

## MORE OLD FRIENDS.

IT was now July and summer in earnest. The sun had scorched all the colour out of the parks. The trees in the squares looked brown as in autumn. The red-hot faces of the omnibus drivers blazed from Camberwell Gate to Hammersmith Broadway, as watchfires of old from Ida to the Arachnæan hills when Troy was taken. Yet the rich and pleasure-loving stayed on ; and Kitty, for whom awaited the cool glades and over-arching bowers of Akenholme Park, dreaded the very word "departure" as a sentence.

Sir George used to say to her again and again, not imagining that his Elysium could be her Hades—

" My dear child, when Ella runs away from us we can winter at Akenholme. Only think of the comfortable, undisturbed life it will be ; and I really see no reason why we should not let the London house for a time."

Poor Kitty ! She determined to shut out this idea of the comfortable, undisturbed winters at Akenholme Park, and enjoy the present whilst it lasted. She hardly dared to speak to Ella on the subject of her marriage, so greatly did she dread what she knew would follow. One day Ella happened to say—

" Mr Tyrrell wants me to marry him this autumn, and proposes to take me to Egypt for my wedding trip."

" And have you consented ?" asked Kitty, almost breathlessly.

" Oh no," Ella answered, laughing. " He must have a little patience. There is time enough."

" How dreary it will be when you are gone—how dreary !" Kitty said, sighing.

" I hope not, dear Kitty. You must rouse papa, and make him see how necessary a little change is for you. Why should you not take the Nile journey with us—or, at any rate, part of it ?"

But Kitty knew in her secret heart that she could not rouse Sir George. If she roused him at all it must be by sheer force of will and temper ; and to exercise will and temper now would

be changing herself from an angel into a virago. Sir George doated on the angel, but he ruled her with a rod of iron ; he would hate the virago, but she knew that he would fear and obey her. Any happy medium did not exist ; her simple Yea and Nay could never carry weight as Ella's did, because she had hitherto taught Sir George that his will was hers. She could not turn round and play the shrew whilst the singing of the siren was fresh in his ears. Goethe has said, "Der augenblick ist Ewigkeit!"—"The present moment is eternity." And Kitty's present satisfied her as if indeed it were to last for ever. The most trifling accessories of every-day existence delighted her. The most trifling dignities of her new position filled her with childish enjoyment.

Just before the London season came to an end, Lady Adela gave a magnificent reception. Kitty moved from room to room, lost in admiration of the brilliant lights, the costly flowers, the stars and orders, the diamonds, the satins, the lace.

Amongst the crowd of Lady Adela's guests, numbering a foreign prince or two, ambassadors, peers and peeresses, bishops, statesmen, and generals, Kitty and Sir George were not naturally of much account. A man who spends his best years abroad simply for his own good-will and pleasure, and then presents himself in England, has no right to feel disappointed if he stands at a disadvantage. What has he done for society that society should do him homage ? Again, if he brings home a young wife, of whom the world knows nothing, what right has he to take offence at her apparent insignificance ? In Lady Adela's world, Lady Bartelotte was supremely insignificant, and the truth dawned upon Kitty when the first flush of her enjoyment was over. She knew a few people, and had been introduced to some strangers, but there anything like sharing in the universal sociality was at an end. Ella never attended late parties, or matters would have been better. Looking on the gay scene by her husband's side, Kitty felt almost as much out of place as if she had been transported thither fresh from the poverty and inexperience of Paradise Place years ago. A few minutes before she had wished that Mrs Cornford and Vittoria could see her moving amid these

splendid crowds, "with all her bravery on," but now the child-like wish was recalled.

"I suppose we shall be going soon?" she said to Sir George—"it is already late."

"As you please—exactly as you please, my dear. Oh! here is Tyrrell. Let us hear what he has to say."

"Are not these rooms superb?" asked Mr Tyrrell of Kitty, after a little talk. "They have been re-decorated since Lady Adela was last in England. Her taste is faultless."

Then he drew Kitty's attention to some exquisite wall-painting, and the general harmony of colour displayed throughout the room.

"By the by," he said, after a time, "I have just seen an old friend of yours, Lady Bartelotte. I got Lady Adela to introduce me—no easy matter, I assure you. He happens to be the one person everybody wants to know, and is certainly most delightful. I mean Dr Norman."

"Dr Norman here?" Kitty asked, greatly astonished.

"You may well look astonished, for he is almost a hermit; but Lady Adela persuades people against their wills. He is just talking with Lord —, one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Dr Norman's scientific speculations."

"Suppose we go and look for him?" Sir George said, tickled at the idea of encountering his old antagonist and rival. "What do you say, Kitty?"

"Just as you please, dear," Kitty said; and they went.

"You never mentioned to us," Mr Tyrrell went on, "that Dr Norman's daughter was married to Perugino Neeve, the young artist whose pictures have been so talked of lately—and such a pretty daughter, too!"

Kitty was getting more and more out of her depth. She said, with quite a bewildered look, "They, too, here?" feeling as much surprised as if Mrs Cornford's presence had been announced.

"Lady Adela adores genius, you know, and there is very little doubt of Mr Neeve being a genius."

Then Mr Tyrrell went on to say how Perry had been introduced to So-and-So, and So-and-So, and how he and his young

wife were said to be the handsomest people in the room—with a few exceptions, he put in parenthetically, adding—

“It must be very pleasant to have genius. Like a golden key, it unlocks all the treasure-stores of the world. I have heard”—here he dropped his voice—“that this very Perugino Neeve, whom Lady Adela’s guests are praising and lionising, used to live in an attic among a company of the veriest Bohemians that ever were. But there’s Dr Norman! He is still in the heat of his discussion, so we will just pass on.”

They approached slowly, and Kitty had time to look well at her old friend and faithful lover. He appeared younger, rather than older, to her thinking, the natural effect of a more elaborate toilette and better-trimmed beard; for Dr Norman, like all frail mortals, owed a good deal to outward adornment; and his expression was animated, eager, almost joyous, as he debated on some favourite topic. Without being at all a striking-looking or handsome man, Dr Norman could bear comparison with the more physically favoured of his fellows. His presence was simple and yet full of dignity, his brow noble, his smile sweet, his voice clear and musical. As they went by, he looked up, and recognising Kitty in all her dignity of pink satin and diamonds, bowed coldly and let her pass. There was not a vestige of a smile on his lips, not a shade of friendliness in the look with which he greeted her, not a sign of anything like the recognition Kitty had expected from him. It is easy to convey irrevocable meanings with a glance of the eyes, a smile, or a hand-clasp, and she had always hoped for a token of perfect forgiveness at Dr Norman’s hands, whenever they might chance to meet. What so natural for him now as to have stepped forward and said a friendly word? Kitty, who had always given her friends stones when they had asked for bread, could not understand, could not pardon them for doing the same. Dr Norman’s conduct was hard, cruel, unjustifiable, she said to herself, and it was with much ado she could keep the angry tears from rising to her eyes. Why were men so hard upon women? If she had wronged him, had she not atoned for her wrong long ago by keen self-reproach? Poor Kitty! As if passive self-reproach of itself can atone for

wrong ! She felt, moreover, a little natural mortification at the conviction of her husband's insignificance. Even Perry poor, despised, neglected, absurd Perry, had made a better figure at this noble lady's house than he ! What was Sir George Bartelotte to society, that it should trouble itself to smile upon him ? And as Sir George Bartelotte's wife, she must, of course, share his insignificance. She wished and intended from her heart of hearts to be true and good and loyal to him, who had chosen her for his wife. This, if anything, must be her salvation in the future.

"How did you enjoy the party, my love?" asked Sir George, after settling himself comfortably in a corner of the carriage.

"It was magnificent!" Kitty said.

"What an odd coincidence that we should meet Dr Norman at Lady Adela's, above all places ! He's a gentlemanly fellow, though surly as a bear—and I've nothing to say against Lady Adela's receiving him. But what was Tyrrell telling you about your old protégé—the painter ?"

"He is married to Dr Norman's daughter, and they were both there," Kitty answered, calmly.

"The deuce he was ! But I thought you described him as a sort of Bohemian, one of those delectable persons one meets with in Balzac's or Mürger's novels ?"

"He was very poor once, and the society he lived in called itself Bohemian."

"Then all that I can say is, that English society is getting so damnably democratic (excuse me, my dear), that I think we had better give it up altogether, and go abroad again. How thankful you must be that you married me, and washed your hands clean of your old friends—eh, Kitty ?"

"But it does not seem as if my old friends were anything to be ashamed of," Kitty said, laughing a little bitterly. "They received twice as much homage as you or I did."

"Pshaw !" said Sir George. "Lady Adela is a lion-hunter. That is all. She would invite the King of the Cannibal Islands if he came to London. Take my advice, my dear Kitty, and look upon yourself as a lucky woman to have married a respectable man instead of any of your high-flying geniuses."

And thereupon the worthy baronet began to doze, and by the time the carriage stopped in Clarges Street, was sound asleep. Ella had gone to bed long ago, but little Françine was waiting to undress her mistress.

“Mon Dieu ! que Miladi est belle ce soir !” she said again and again, as she took off the pink satin dress and the diamonds, and unbraided Kitty’s long dark hair.

But Kitty smiled no response upon the little thing as she had done many and many a time before.

“What does it matter ? Qu'est que cela fait !” she said, impatiently, and that was all. She was bewildered by the events of the evening. The splendour of the scene, the sense of her own and her husband’s insignificance—nay, isolation—the chance meeting with Dr Norman, the fact of Perry’s presence; all these things perplexed her as painfully as mathematical problems perplex a student in the deliriums of fever.

And Dr Norman’s look—so stern, so steadfast—so retributive—haunted her as she lay wakeful on her soft pillows.

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## CHAPTER LXXII.

### *KITTY'S LAST APPEARANCE IN BOHEMIA.*

AT last the London season came to an end. Mr Tyrrell had overruled Ella’s objections to a speedy marriage ; so that all prospect of a winter abroad was over, and Kitty was making preparations for a long stay at Akenholme Park. Three months were to intervene before the marriage took place ; after which, Mr Tyrrell proposed that they should carry out his first plan of a Nile journey. To this, also, Ella had consented. She was so much stronger now than of old, and had ever longed to see the Pyramids. She saw, moreover, how utterly impossible it was for her to interfere successfully on behalf of Kitty. Once she had attempted to convince Sir George that Kitty would find Akenholme a dreary home in winter, and he had said—

“My darling, a woman must live where her husband likes. It is surely a little late for Kitty to come to the conclusion that my house is a dull one.”

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And then he went straight to Kitty, and asked her angrily if she had wished Ella to be a go-between, and if indeed she was so unreasonable as to have fancies about this or that place being dull. Because, if so, he added, the sooner she got accustomed to the dullness the better. It was a pleasant prospect for a man, forsooth ! if such a home as Akenholme Park could not satisfy his wife a few months after marriage, etcetera, etcetera. Kitty listened, meek as a lamb ; and confessed, with penitent tears and insinuating words, that the thought of losing Ella had made her dread a winter at Akenholme. But Sir George was not easily pacified. She had to cry *Peccavi ! Peccavi !* a hundred times, to cover her head with dust and ashes, to crave for pardon in humbled tones before he forgave her. Then, condescending to bestow a kiss upon her pale, tear-wet cheek, he went away, and punished her—as he thought—by being a little cold, a little dictatorial, and extremely exacting for a day or two. Ella, seeing how matters stood, wisely held her peace for the future, and Kitty banished the word “dull” from her vocabulary. Sir George congratulated himself upon the way in which he was training his young high-spirited wife. He had always resolved upon being an angel of goodness to her, but on the condition of her unquestioning obedience only. When that was withheld, he considered any amount of harshness justifiable, and indeed expedient. Marriage had not improved the baronet's character; and it had marred the one admirable trait in it—namely, his unselfish love for Ella. Between him and his child, as was certainly natural, just a shade of mistrust, just the merest suspicion of coldness, had grown up since the day on which Ella discerned that he and Kitty were secretly leagued against her. But Ella loved her father too dearly to be quite happy whilst such unhappy feelings lasted, and it was this reason that had induced her to favour Mr Tyrrell's plan. She thought a temporary separation would surely set matters straight ; and would also put her relationship with Kitty on a safer footing.

The journey into Suffolk was determined upon early in August. There was a great deal of shopping to do meanwhile on Ella's account ; and Kitty, who loved to be busy, was driving about all day long. It happened on the last day before depar-

ture, that she had to transact some business with a certain seedsman and florist at Fulham. Sir George was fond of arboriculture, and had deputed her to procure some seeds of the *Eucalyptus Globulus*, an Australian tree, which was just then much discussed in the newspapers. Chance therefore led Kitty into the well-known haunts of her girlhood. She passed the little so-called Brompton lanes, through which she and Perry had strolled—ah! how many a Sunday evening! talking lovers' talk, laughing, sporting, like the happy vagabonds they were! She passed the West Brompton Cemetery, where Perry's father lay buried—thanks to Polly Cornford's goodness—and other friends of Bohemia, whose bones, but for Polly, would have been “only a pauper's, nobody owns!” And she thought of her own grave—Lady Bartelotte's—in the family vault at Akenholme Church. How stately, how far away from those of her early friends and lovers it would be! Life seemed so strange, could death be stranger? Then she came to those lonely old granges, so ghostly, so deserted, so weird, that still stand amid tangled gardens, and give this part of London the picturesque, old-world look it wears. She had often come here with Perry on a painting expedition, and remembered every feature of the landscape so well. Here was a pariah apple-tree he had pillaged for her. There was a bench on which they sat to eat the contents of his wallet. A little farther on was an inn, where they were picked up when rain came on by a town-traveller, who obligingly gave them a ride home. Kitty for the nonce lost sight of the discomfort of that early time, and recollects only how loving and merry and free-hearted it had been. And how true! Then, indeed, out of the fulness of the heart had the mouth ever spoken!

Amid these retrospections she had longings—not immortal, like Cleopatra's,—but longings that were human, wistful, childishly loving! She felt as if she must see an old familiar face, and hear an old familiar voice once more. She had, as it were, parted with her youth in a sullen, vindictive mood; but now she repented of her sullenness, and wished to say a late but tender adieu. Why should she not go to Paradise Place? The servants were to be dismissed next day; and, even in any case, how could a visit to Polly Cornford scandalise

her? She should not tell Sir George; but if Sir George discovered it, he could hardly be angry. There was, surely, no more harm in stopping at Paradise Place than at the seedsman's, who lived within a stone's throw? If the neighbourhood were a disreputable one, Sir George should not have sent her thither. She gave the order; and, to the intense amazement of the little colony, an open carriage and pair stopped at Polly Cornford's door.

"Ask if Mrs Cornford is within," she said to the man; "if not, leave this."

So saying, she slipped a ten-pound note into an envelope, scribbled inside—"For Papa Peter, from K. B." and put it in the man's hand.

But Mrs Cornford was within. Kitty descended, and followed the little maid-of-all-work in-doors.

"Put on a clean apron, Mary Hann, and say, 'Please will your ladyship take a seat,'" Polly had said on recognising her visitor from a front window. Then she proceeded hastily to array herself in her best cap, and threw a silk shawl over her shoulders by way of showing Kitty respect, and further impressing the mind of pert Mary Hann.

Kitty waited in the dingy little sitting-room. How familiar it looked—how unchanged! There was the little bookcase with its greasy Byrons and Shakespeares, and Waverleys and Sues, from which Perry had read aloud many and many a winter's evening. She remembered that the very arm-chair on which she sat had been mended by Perry again and again. And the table before her—as if in a vision—became surrounded with old friendly faces. And the little garden behind seemed on a sudden alive with old familiar voices. Were Perry and the children really watering the borders of nasturtium and mignonette, or was she dreaming?

"How d'ye do, Lady Bartelotte?" said Polly, holding out her hand with as much formality as she was capable of. "I hope I see you well."

But Kitty put her arms about her old friend, and kissed her cordially, and reiterated—

"I am so glad to see you again, Polly—so glad!"

"I'll take you at your word for once," Polly said, smiling; and forgetting the resolutions she had just made not to shock Lady Bartelotte with undue familiarities, she stroked her lace mantle, and viewed her silk dress, and costly little parasol admiringly.

"My! my dear," she cried, with childish admiration; "do you wear such beautiful clothes every day?"

Kitty made some vague sort of response, then said—

"Tell me of yourself, dear Polly. Are you prosperous? And the children and Papa Peter, are they well?"

"Oh! as for myself," Polly answered, "I've my ups and downs—six of one and half-a-dozen of t'other, pretty regularly, and that's what I take most people's lives to be. You're one of the lucky ones, and know most about the ups."

But Kitty was determined not to talk of herself.

"And the chicks, and Papa Peter?" she repeated.

"Oh! the chicks are in the country. They're a sad lot, but the house is dull without 'em now. I 'prenticed Mimi to Emilia Bianchi to learn photography, and she ran away! Old Petroff-sky is very well—you must see him before you go. I suppose you've been leading a gay life of it lately?"

"We are going to be very quiet now in the country," Kitty said, drawing lines on the carpet with her little lace-bordered parasol.

"Oh dear! it does seem odd that things are as they are," Polly said, striving to be gay. "I'm as puzzled as a rat who has lost his tail. It's just four years ago, isn't it, this month, since you started off to go to Shelley House? Who would have thought of your coming back Lady Bartelotte?"

"I've been very ungrateful to you all along, Polly," Kitty said, looking on the ground; "but I know you forgive me."

"Twiddle-dum-dee!" cried Polly; and seeing Kitty still look grave, added—"Hoity-toity-tum! Don't moralise, my dear."

Kitty did not seem to hear, and continued in the same voice—

"I often wonder at myself for having behaved to you as I have done; and yet I know if I came to you years hence, a beggar and in rags, you would take me in."

"Pray don't talk in that proper sort of strain, Kitty. It makes me feel quite bad to hear you. Let bygones be bygones, I say; if I were riled with you once for Perry's sake, it couldn't last for ever. Let's go up-stairs and see Petroffsky, by way of enlivening us a bit."

Kitty followed Polly up the narrow little staircase, Mary Hann watching her aghast with surprise.

"He's always prating about his beautiful Katherine, poor old soul!" Polly said; then, heightening her voice, added—"Here's Lady Bartelotte come to see you, my dear—our Kitty that was, you know."

"Enfin!" the old man said, looking up with the bewilderment of paralysis—"Enfin! welcome, bel enfant!"

He would have kissed her hand, but Kitty, moved by the sight of his age and helplessness, leaned forward and kissed him on the brow. Petroffsky was perhaps the only friend of her childhood whom she had never wronged by a selfish, unkind act. He wiped his eyes, looked at her again and again, shy, joyful, puzzled.

"Que vous êtes belle!" he said, surveying her from head to foot. "And Monsieur Perugino, is he in good health? Ah! Monsieur Perugino seldom comes to play cribbage with me now!"

"He always persists in thinking Perry is married to you," Polly whispered. "Don't contradict him."

"Et votre chapeau," he said, after a pause, recalling the bonnet he had earned for her years ago, by dint of French lessons. "Votre chapeau? Était-il beau? But that demoiselle had a head of wood. She never achieved the verb *être*—never!"

Kitty smiled, though tears were in her eyes. The bonnet was very pretty, she said. Then he begged Madame Cornford to present his beautiful Katherine with the neck-ribbons that had been the fruits of further lessons to the demoiselle with the head of wood.

"He's been saving these for you all these years," Polly said, in an under-tone. "Say you're pleased."

Of course, Kitty took the neck-ribbons and said she was pleased. The old man wiped his eyes.

"Mais que vous êtes en grand tenue, bel enfant!" he said. "Monsieur Perugino doit être bien riche alors. Ah! why do you come so seldom? Is it because my poor violin is broken, and I can no longer play to you? My fingers have no music in them now," he added, looking down at his poor helpless hands, "and my violin was too polite to survive them. Voilà tout!"

"Kitty lives too far off to come often," cried out Polly. "That's why she can't come."

Then she nudged Kitty, who made her adieux as best she could, and they left him.

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## CHAPTER LXXIII.

### *CONCLUSION.*

"Now for another old friend," Polly said; and before Kitty had time to collect her thoughts, she was standing on the threshold of Perry's studio, face to face with Perry. He came forward and shook hands, saying never a word. Kitty mastered herself by a great effort.

"I did not know that you came here to paint now," she said, quite calmly.

"My new studio will not be finished till the spring. Do sit down."

Then he placed a chair for her, but she said she would rather not sit down, adding—

"I want to look at your new picture."

"My pictures all go home as soon as they are ready," Perry said. "There is only this sketch on the easel."

They stood before the easel and talked a little while. Kitty asked after Laura. Perry asked after her husband. There were no artificial smiles or words; each reading the other's naked heart too well.

"The studio is not much changed, is it?" he asked. "The last time you were in this room we figured as Antony and Cleopatra. Do you remember? There are the wreaths of paper-roses we wore, hanging about the lamp still."

"I remember it all," she answered, looking at the faded flowers festooned about the gas-lamps.

"What a farce it was!" he said, with a ghastly smile—"I mean, what a tragedy!"

They were alone now, standing side by side, and some inexplicable sympathy, born of memory, of love, of sorrow, and of the ineffable passion of youth, drew them in spirit near to each other. For a moment they clasped hands and looked into each other's tearful eyes. It was as if a wand had touched them, and they were young and fond and free again.

"Tell me," Perry said, with almost inquisitorial eagerness, part savage, part tender, "are you happy?"

"What is happiness?" Kitty answered, with all the cynicism, and more than the bitterness of Pilate.

Perry dropped her hand. The spell was broken. She seemed in those words to have explained the riddle of her own life, and the mystical sorrow of his. What indeed was happiness to her? He felt as if he had seen a black chasm under a flash of lightning, and drew back horrified. What was he, what was any one to her? She did not know the meaning of happiness; or, if she did, despised alike the idea and the thing itself.

The Kitty of old must be a dream! When Polly returned, they were talking of Perry's proposed trip to Italy and the East in a year or two, and of Kitty's journey to Akenholme Park, with cold, even voices. Kitty, glancing out of the window, saw the carriage waiting for her, and trembled. Was she in a vision?

"Come, Perry," Polly said, "tell Kitty all the news. He's on a fair way to fame and fortune now, Kitty; that last picture of his was a trump card, and no mistake."

And she rattled on by way of covering the embarrassment of the others, till at last Kitty said she must go.

Perry did not offer to see her into her carriage. "Good-bye," he said, on the threshold. "God bless you!"

"Good-bye," she answered. Remembering Dr Norman's stern look, she dared not to add, "Give my love to Laura."

When alone in the passage with Polly Cornford, she brought out her gift for Papa Peter. "You must let me help him. It

makes me so happy," she pleaded, adding, with a dreary smile, "I never behaved badly to him, you know."

"Oh! I'll take your ten-pound note, and welcome," Polly said, blithely. "It's good for your soul to be generous; and Petroffsky and I are not proud."

Kitty kissed Polly; and, as was natural, they both cried a little.

"I wish I had been good to you," Kitty whispered; then she drew down her veil and turned away.

Mary Hann opened the door wide, and dropped a curtsey; the footman helped her in, and all Paradise Place watched the departure of Polly Cornford's magnificent guest in wonder and admiration.

"God bless you, Kitty!" soliloquised Polly, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "There's good in the worst of us, in spite of what the parsons say. And I for one am no saint that I should be dirty particular!"

Kitty never again showed herself in Bohemia. Whether she ever wished to do so, or whether she liked best to stay in the world of her own choosing, history does not say. Certain it is that where the fortunes of Lady Bartelotte begin, the story of Kitty Silver ends. A French writer has said, "In the close of the romance is sure to be the germ of another;" and the first may be as strange as the last. *Qui sait?*

#### THE END.

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